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Actor injured in SAF exercise in New Zealand dies

Lim Min Zhang

An independent committee of inquiry will look into the death of 28-year-old actor Aloysius Pang, who was injured in a Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) exercise in New Zealand.

The Ministry of Defence confirmed at 11.35 last night that Corporal First Class (NS) Pang Wei Chong died at 8.45pm Singapore time at Waikato Hospital, where he had undergone surgery after an accident last Saturday during the annual live-firing exercise Thunder Warrior.

Mindef said CFC Pang, an armament technician from the 268th Battalion Singapore Artillery, was carrying out repair works inside a self-propelled howitzer with two other soldiers when he sustained injuries as the gun barrel was lowered. The operationally ready national serviceman was evacuated to Waikato Hospital, a regional trauma centre in Hamilton, where he underwent surgery a number of times to treat his injuries.

"Despite surgical attempts to re-



pair damaged organs and putting him on artificial life support, CFC Pang succumbed to the injuries and passed away," said Mindef, adding that a press conference chaired by defence chief Melvyn Ong will be held today to present the preliminary findings.

Meanwhile, the SAF will make arrangements to bring the body back to Singapore. "Mindef and the SAF extend their deepest condolences to the family of CFC Pang and will continue to render assistance and support in their time of loss."

At around 11 last night, netizens started pointing out how Mr Pang's fellow acting colleagues were changing their social media profile pictures to black and white, driving speculation that the worst had come to pass.

Mediacorp's winner of Best Newcomer award in 2015, he was due to start shooting Channel 8 drama My One In A Million next month.

Mr Pang's parents and his two elder brothers had flown to Hamilton earlier. A post late last night on the actor's Instagram account – appeared to have been written by one of his brothers – read: "Throughout the past few days at the hospital, it has been a difficult time for us. Every news that was brought upon us since his last op was devastating with little signs of hope on his recovery."

"We all broke down when the medical team spoke to us that his condition was worsening and we should be prepared for the worst. We are going to lose a brother. And my parents are going to lose their precious son, who is only 28."

Mediacorp described his death as "a devastating loss".

Earlier in the day, Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen had posted on his Facebook page that CFC Pang's condition was very serious and he needed artificial life support for his lungs, kidneys and heart.

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SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A4

Singapore releases framework on ethical use of AI

'Living document' will guide businesses and evolve along with changes in digital economy

Sumiko Tan
Executive Editor
In Davos

Singapore has released a framework on how artificial intelligence (AI) can be ethically and responsibly used, which businesses in the Republic and elsewhere can adopt as

they grapple with issues that have emerged with new technology.

This model framework for AI governance is a "living document" intended to evolve along with the fast-paced changes in a digital economy.

It takes in feedback from the industry, and will be tweaked when it gets more views.

The framework was released by

Mr S. Iswaran, Minister for Communications and Information, at the annual World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting. It is the first in Asia to provide detailed and readily implementable guidance to private sector organisations using AI, said the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA).

AI, in essence, refers to computer programs or machines that can perform tasks normally requiring human intelligence. It includes technology involving functions such as speech recognition and decision-

making. For example, an online store might use AI to fully automate how it recommends products to a user based on his browsing and buying history.

But questions have been raised on issues such as what if control and data fall into the wrong hands.

IMDA said two principles underpin Singapore's framework.

One is that decisions made by or with the help of AI are explainable, transparent and fair to consumers. The second is that AI solutions are human-centric.

Mr Iswaran, who spoke to reporters on Tuesday on the sidelines of the WEF, described AI as frontier technology that has the potential to affect many sectors in very profound ways. Singapore, he said, wants to be prepared in terms of its capabilities, technology investments and regulations.

On this front, the Republic has been working on several AI initiatives, including an Advisory Council on the Ethical Use of AI and Data chaired by former attorney-general V.K. Rajah.

Mr Iswaran said the framework was being released at the WEF because it is a forum of global industry and government leaders, and a place

where Singapore has always had "a certain mindshare" in terms of contributing to cutting-edge development and governance of policies.

It also allows Singapore to invite global feedback on the framework.

Indeed, issues related to the digital economy are key topics at this year's Davos meeting, with no fewer than 40 sessions devoted to it, many specifically on AI.

As for whether an AI governance model would deter companies from setting up shop in Singapore, Mr Iswaran stressed that it is not a set of prescriptive rules but a framework for companies to use.

He did not think the industry would be deterred. "On the contrary, we might even be able to come out as one of the jurisdictions with sound approaches to data management and the governance of AI and other frontier technologies. In this case, more companies would want to be associated with us."

In a statement, Mr Rajah said he supported the release of the framework and urged businesses to pilot it and give feedback.

Singapore also announced a collaboration with the WEF's Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution to further drive AI and data innovation, including engaging organisations to discuss Singapore's framework and facilitate its adoption.

Meanwhile, speaking later in the day at a panel discussion on "Geopolitics", Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat hoped that the United States and China would resolve their disputes as the stakes were very high for the rest of the world.

"Imagine if all of us were on a plane and the pilot and the co-pilot are fighting each other," he said.

In a special address, Chinese Vice-President Wang Qishan said that his country would continue to post sustainable growth despite global uncertainties, calling it an "indisputable fact".

China grew 6.6 per cent last year, its worst showing in 28 years.

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SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A6&7

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10 must-reads for today

1 Row over HK Bill

Disrespecting the Chinese national anthem may soon come at the price of three years in jail and a fine in Hong Kong. The penalties are prescribed in a Bill presented to the city's lawmakers and which critics say raises fresh fears over freedom of expression.

WORLD A14



A pro-democracy activist holding a sign showing Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Patrick Nip in Hong Kong yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

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VIDEO

Bold exchange

Oxford student Darrion Mohan's exchange with Malaysia's Prime Minister has garnered mostly supportive comments on social media, although there were some critics. Here is a recap of what happened.

<http://str.sg/oxtalk>



WEB SPECIAL

Pet sensations

News of Boo the pomeranian's death broke the hearts of many netizens, but there are other pet pooches that have also gained an online following. Here are some famous dogs on the Internet.

<http://str.sg/moreboo>

2 Guide on ethical AI use

A framework on how artificial intelligence (AI) can be ethically and responsibly used by businesses was released by Singapore at a World Economic Forum meeting. It is the first in Asia to give detailed and readily implementable guidance on the use of AI for private sector organisations.

TOP OF THE NEWS A1

4 Debate on arctic tourism

The prospect of more tourists in the region around the North Pole as sea ice melts has raised concerns over how Arctic communities and the environment would cope with the influx. Among those proposing solutions is Singapore infrastructure company Keppel Corporation.

WORLD A23

6 Few seeking oBike refunds

Most oBike users owed money by the bicycle operator, which ended its operations last June, have not filed claims to get their deposits back. Only \$438,878.43 worth of claims have been lodged out of the \$8.91 million that the firm registered in its records.

HOME B2



PHOTO: SUPER LEAGUE TRIATHLON

9 Athlete aims for S'pore win

American triathlete Katie Zaferes (left) is aiming to win both her races at the Super League Triathlon's season finale in Singapore on Feb 23 and Feb 24. The 29-year-old currently leads the women's rankings after three stops – Jersey, Malta and Mallorca – and sees this leg as good training towards her goal of winning a medal at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.

SPORT C7

3 Khaw, KL minister hold talks

Singapore Transport Minister Khaw Boon Wan sought to extend the one-month suspension of Malaysia's restricted area over Pasir Gudang and new landing procedures at Seletar Airport so as to allow officials to thrash out airspace issues. He met his Malaysian counterpart Anthony Loke, who described the meeting as "fruitful and constructive".

TOP OF THE NEWS A4

5 Stronger helping hands

The growth of medium-sized and large charities here reflects two trends in the social service sector: The relentless push towards professionalism and consolidation measures, says senior social affairs correspondent Theresa Tan (below).

OPINION A26



8 Higher inflation in Dec

Singapore's headline inflation climbed to 0.5 per cent last month compared with the same period in 2017. The change reflects higher inflation for services and retail items, as well as a smaller decline in accommodation costs, the Monetary Authority of Singapore and Ministry of Trade and Industry said yesterday.

BUSINESS C1

10 Korean zombie series

The undead are a good way to make a Korean period drama such as Kingdom more accessible to international audiences, said its lead actor Ju Ji-hoon. "As we know, zombie stories are loved across the world. Kingdom is a universal zombie story with a Korean flavour," he said.

LIFE D5

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Instagram profile pictures of various celebrities and that of Mr Aloysius Pang's account were changed to black and white even before the Ministry of Defence had issued a statement. Mr Pang (right), who started acting at age nine, was 28.



Mr Pang (above, right) with the other cast members of Channel 8 drama It Takes Two, and with actress Carrie Wong (below) at the press conference for the premiere of Channel 8 drama series You Can Be An Angel 2. He was due to be the male lead alongside the actress and actor James Seah in the drama My One In A Million next month after Chinese New Year. PHOTOS: MEDIACORP, TNP FILE



Fellow artists pay tribute to Aloysius Pang

Mindef statement says he was injured when gun barrel of howitzer was lowered

Lim Min Zhang and Yip Wai Yee

Tributes poured in for actor Aloysius Pang last night as news broke of his death four days after he was seriously injured in a military exercise in New Zealand last Saturday.

Corporal First Class (NS) Pang, an armament technician from the 268th Battalion Singapore Artillery, was 28. Even before the Ministry of Defence issued a statement last night confirming his death, celebrities on social media had changed their profile pictures to black and white.

Later, when his death was confirmed, fellow actor Shane Pow wrote on Instagram: "It wasn't

enough being brothers with you this life. Let's be brothers again next life. I love you my big brother."

Mediacorp actor Desmond Tan commented on Mr Pang's Instagram account, writing: "Bro, you are an important chapter in all our lives. Nothing is wrong, just that you went ahead of us like you always do as a human and actor. We will see you in future."

Actress Carrie Wong said: "I always say to you, 'Why is it you again?' but really, I want to say, it was my good fortune to have worked with you so many times. Thank you for always bringing sunshine to others. Always remember you. I'll see you next time."

Mr Pang started as a child actor at the age of nine and was due to start shooting Channel 8 romantic drama My One In A Million next month.

In a statement reported by Channel NewsAsia, Mediacorp said: "He was a highly capable actor who had grown in skill and versatility but remained humble, diligent

and ever willing to help others."

It added: "He will always be remembered for his good-heartedness, his sincere, unaffected earnestness and his professionalism. He showed respect to everyone, especially his elders."

The operationally ready national serviceman died after he was injured in his chest and abdominal areas while carrying out repair works inside a Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) self-propelled howitzer during an annual live-firing exercise called Thunder Warrior.

He underwent abdominal surgery that evening, with a planned follow-up surgery completed on Monday.

However, CFC Pang's condition worsened and he required additional surgery, which was completed on Tuesday just before midnight, said Mindef yesterday.

Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen had given an update earlier yesterday on his condition, saying it was "very serious" and that he needed artificial support for his lungs, kidneys and heart.

Surgeons and staff at Waikato Hospital in Hamilton, where CFC Pang was ward in the intensive care unit, were doing all they could to keep up the support and improve his condition, wrote Dr Ng in his Facebook post.

In a later statement, Mindef said that he was injured when the howitzer's gun barrel was lowered, and died at 8.45pm yesterday despite surgical attempts to repair damaged organs and after putting him on artificial life support.

Chinese-language evening newspaper Shin Min Daily News reported yesterday that Mr Pang had suffered blunt-force trauma.

Tan Tock Seng Hospital's chief of trauma and acute care surgery Teo Li Tserng had been working with the New Zealand medical team to provide the best care for CFC Pang since arriving on Tuesday morning, added Mindef.

Mr Pang's parents, as well as his two elder brothers, had also flown to Hamilton, accompanied by SAF family liaison officers.

While an investigation into the cause of the incident is ongoing, no further details were available about the safety procedures in place when doing repair work on the howitzer.

Repair and maintenance work on the howitzer, which entered service in 2003, is usually done in teams and supervised by a commander, said a former serviceman familiar with the platform. In combat, it is operated by a crew of four.

The Singapore self-propelled howitzer, which is no longer in production, is currently only operated by national service battalions, added the serviceman, who spoke on condition of anonymity. The Next-Gen Howitzer high-mobility weapon system, operated by a three-man crew, is envisaged to be introduced from next year.

There were two other incidents that led to deaths in the past year.

In April last year, Corporal First Class Dave Lee Han Xuan, 19, from the 1st Guards Battalion, died close to two weeks after being admitted to Changi General Hospital for heatstroke.

In November last year, Corporal First Class Liu Kai, 22, died after a Bionix vehicle reversed into the Land Rover he was in. An army-wide safety timeout was declared after the incident at Jalan Murai Training Area.

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• Additional reporting by Vanessa Liu

Khaw meets Malaysian minister over airspace issues

Karamjit Kaur
Senior Aviation Correspondent

Singapore is seeking to extend a mutual one-month suspension of two measures while it thrashes out airspace issues with Malaysia.

Transport Minister Khaw Boon Wan sought to extend the suspension of Malaysia's restricted area over Pasir Gudang and new landing procedures at Seletar Airport to give officials "more discussion time to reach a win-win outcome".

Mr Khaw said that he made this proposal to his Malaysian counterpart Anthony Loke, whom he met in Singapore for a "heart-to-heart discussion".

"He will take my suggestion back to his Cabinet colleagues," Mr Khaw said in a Facebook post yesterday.

Also writing on Facebook, Mr Loke said that he had a "fruitful and constructive meeting" with Mr Khaw.

"We agreed on the way forward to solve the Seletar Airport issue, and the civil aviation authorities of both countries will continue the discussion on the technical aspects," he added.



This is the third time that the two ministers have met, after previous meetings in Putrajaya, Malaysia, and Bangkok last year. They will meet again after Chinese New Year to continue the discussion over airspace, Mr Khaw said.

Malaysian Transport Minister Anthony Loke with Mr Khaw Boon Wan yesterday. The two ministers will meet again after Chinese New Year to continue the airspace discussion. PHOTO: MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT

instance - the restricted area and the ILS for Seletar.

The agreement was reached at a meeting between Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan and his Malaysian counterpart Saifuddin Abdullah in Singapore.

Malaysia claims that an ILS at Seletar Airport would hamper the construction of tall buildings at Johor's Pasir Gudang, to the north of the airport.

Singapore has said repeatedly that this is not true as the new landing system does not impose new height restrictions.

The only change on introducing an ILS is that pilots will be guided using ground instruments so that they no longer have to rely on just their vision.

On Dec 25, Malaysia declared a restricted area over Pasir Gudang, which was in the flight path for landing and take-off at Singapore's Seletar Airport, from the north.

It meant that all planes heading to and from Seletar would need prior approval from the Royal Malaysian Air Force to operate in that zone between 2,000 ft and 5,000 ft, or avoid the area.

The Singapore-Malaysia airspace

dispute surfaced publicly on Nov 23, when Malaysian carrier Firefly said it would suspend all flights to Singapore from Dec 1, the day it was supposed to move its operations from Changi Airport to Seletar.

It was later revealed that this was because the airline had not received the green light from Malaysia's aviation regulator.

In a recent statement in Parliament, Dr Balakrishnan said: "Ironically, CAAS (Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore) was trying to facilitate Firefly's operations at Seletar by installing the ILS, which Malaysia has now objected to."

The disagreement over flight procedures for Seletar Airport is part of a larger air dispute that also includes Malaysia wanting to take back management of airspace over south Johor, a task that was delegated to Singapore in 1974.

Singapore and Malaysia are also locked in a maritime dispute, sparked by Malaysia's unilateral decision to extend the Johor Baru port limits in October, and subsequent intrusions by Malaysian government vessels into Singapore waters.

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Scan QR code from DBS to give and receive hongbao

Move comes amid calls by MAS to reduce use of new notes during CNY to minimise wastage

Irene Tham
Senior Tech Correspondent

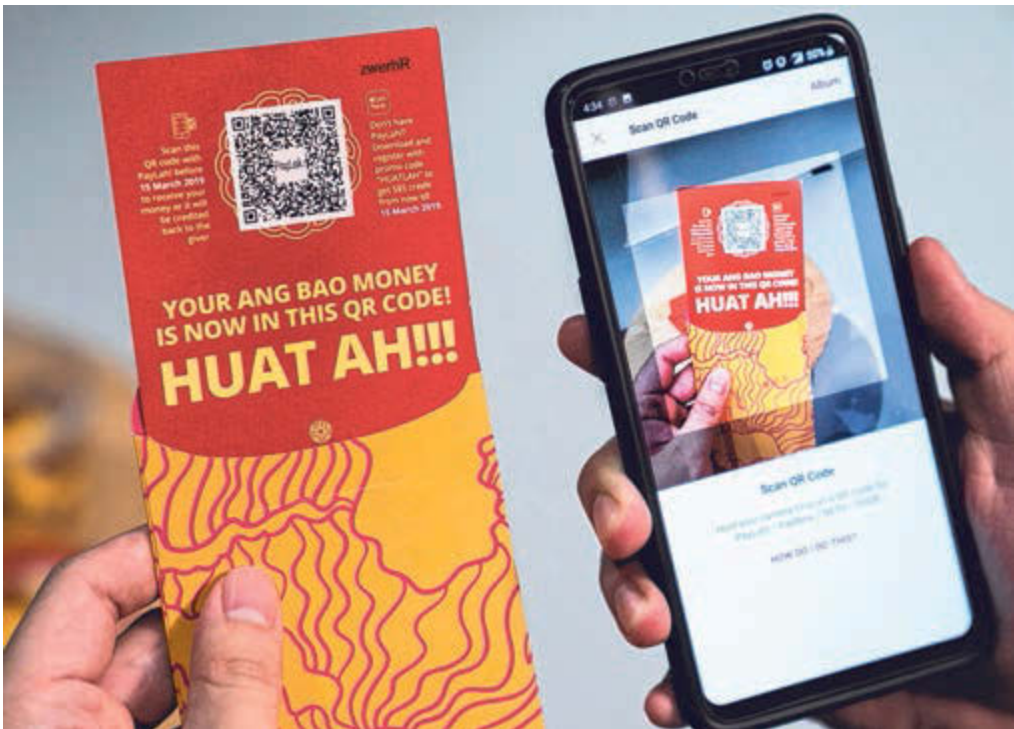
With just over 100,000 e-red packet fund transfers last year, one can hardly envision a cashless Chinese New Year (CNY) in the future. This year, however, DBS Bank is giving a new tech spin to the e-red packets it introduced a few years ago, hoping that the new face of

e-hongbao in the form of a QR code will catch on. The move comes amid calls by the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) to reduce the use of new notes during CNY to minimise wastage. The Straits Times has learnt that up to 40 million of the slightly more than 100 million notes that are printed for CNY each year end up being incinerated as users dump all

the excess notes back into their bank accounts. Banks also do not keep the excess notes and return them to MAS. From tomorrow, DBS, which is South-east Asia's largest bank, will be giving out red paper printed with a unique QR code. Those giving hongbao can scan the QR code using their DBS PayLah e-wallet and indicate the amount they want to give. To redeem, recipients scan the QR code using the DBS PayLah e-wallet. DBS PayLah can be used by anyone with any local bank account. The red paper can be in-

serted into a red packet or given on its own. Said Mr Jeremy Soo, head of DBS Bank Singapore's consumer banking group: "Physical cash does have its drawbacks. It incurs high handling costs for the economy and it can be quite overwhelming queueing for new notes during the CNY season." DBS launched a basic form of e-hongbao in 2015 for DBS PayLah users. It integrated the PayNow interbank fund transfer service into its e-hongbao feature in 2017 so that any bank account user can receive the funds.

Come Feb 1, Citibank will also launch a new e-hongbao feature in the Citi Mobile app to allow fund transfers via PayNow. The other banks in Singapore have not launched their e-hongbao initiatives. The Straits Times understands that there were more than 100,000 e-hongbao fund transfers last year. This pales in comparison to the number of new notes printed yearly to cater to CNY demands. MAS told The Straits Times that \$2 notes account for the bulk of the 100 million new notes issued



From tomorrow, DBS will give out red paper printed with a unique QR code. Using the DBS PayLah e-wallet, those giving hongbao can scan the code to indicate the amount, and recipients can scan to redeem it. PHOTO: DBS

yearly. About 60 per cent of the new \$2 notes are recirculated to meet regular demand, but the rest are incinerated. "This is a waste of resources and not environmentally friendly," said a spokesman for MAS, urging the public to move away from the use of new notes. She also encouraged the use of "good-as-new" \$2 notes from previous years during CNY. MAS' "good-as-new" initiative, started in 2013, has reduced the demand for new \$2 notes during CNY by about 15 per cent yearly. Sales executive J.K. Heng, 44, said he is unsure whether recipients will miss the feel of the crisp new notes in their hongbao packets, but added: "It will be fun to try and use an e-hongbao." Housewife Sakura Yin, 45, said: "Hongbao and the fun of counting notes are really for little children. But I would use e-hongbao for weddings." Even if the cash portion becomes digital, the red packet looks likely to stay. The National Heritage Board's assistant chief executive of policy and community Alvin Tan said: "The act of giving red packets is a custom associated with the Lunar New Year and is part of the Chinese community's intangible cultural heritage." "The act of giving red packets confers blessings upon the recipients and promotes family bonding, as children or youth are expected to pay their respects to their elders before receiving their red packets."

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Thai polls set for March 24; new govt likely by middle of the year

Tan Hui Yee
Indochina Bureau Chief
In Bangkok

Thailand's much delayed general election will be held on March 24, with a new government expected to be in place "by the middle of the year". The confirmation by Thailand's Election Commission (EC) was announced yesterday afternoon, hours after a royal decree declaring

an election was issued. The upcoming election will end military rule that has been in place since 2014, when then army chief Prayut Chan-o-cha led a coup that ousted the Pheu Thai Party-led government and took over as prime minister. A new Constitution enacted in 2017 allows the interim Premier to return to power – even if he does not contest in the election – if he gets enough support from the new Parliament. Earlier plans to hold an election

on Feb 24 were set aside after the government raised concerns that it may clash with some of the royal ceremonies for the coronation of King Maha Vajiralongkorn from May 4 to 6. This will be Thailand's first coronation since 1950. At yesterday's press conference, EC chairman Ittiporn Boonpraong declined to say when the election results would be announced, only that this was still under discussion. In a statement earlier yesterday,

the Prime Minister's Office said: "A House of Representatives and a new government, under a democratic system with His Majesty the King as the Head of State, will be in place by the middle of this year." It asked "all Thai people to help maintain a constructive environment of orderliness, civility and unity over the duration of the general elections and the organisation of the Coronation Ceremony, for the auspiciousness of our nation". For months before the 2014

coup, opponents of the Pheu Thai government had occupied the streets of Bangkok in a bid to oust it. These royalist protesters argued that Pheu Thai, which won a landslide victory in 2011, was being controlled remotely by self-exiled former premier Thaksin Shinawatra, who himself was ousted in a coup in 2006. Rules for the forthcoming election make it very difficult for any big party like Pheu Thai to win a ruling majority. Instead, analysts

expect the future government to be formed by a coalition. Political parties, which had been campaigning in a low-key mode over the past weeks to comply with election rules, declared that they are ready to go full steam ahead. "We are ready... and have been working towards this day for a long time," said Democrat Party spokesman Thana Chiravinij. Former energy minister Pichai Naripthaphan, now a member of Pheu Thai's allied party Thai Raksa Chart, said: "Hopefully, we will have a free and fair election which will be acceptable according to international standards."

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WAR MUST NEVER BE REPEATED

The key question is what have we learnt in the 20th century, on what we should or should not repeat. War is something we should never repeat.



FINANCE MINISTER HENG SWEE KEAT, at the panel discussion in Davos.



Peace and stability top priority for the world: Heng Swee Keat

He outlines three goals for global community at panel discussion in Davos on geopolitical outlook

Ng Jun Sen

The globalised world order needs countries to seek peace and stability, help each other prosper and improve the quality of their people's lives, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos yesterday.

These three goals for the global community will help countries achieve a common understanding and avoid wars, like the two world wars in the 20th century, Mr Heng said at a panel discussion on the geopolitical outlook.

He viewed peace and stability as the top priority, saying: "War is something we should never repeat."

His view was shared by fellow panellist, South Korea's Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha, who said there is a need to make greater

strides towards denuclearisation, adding that the upcoming summit between the American and North Korean leaders will have to deliver concrete results.

Mr Heng also stressed that global free trade plays a key part in bringing prosperity to the world and lifting people's standard of living, in response to a question on the impact of trade and geopolitics on the global economy that was posed by the panel's moderator Borge Brende, who is the WEF president and the former foreign minister of Norway.

Mr Heng said: "A multilateral, rules-based free trade system has brought prosperity to the whole world in the 20th century."

He added that a major part of it occurred in China, after supreme leader Deng Xiaoping opened up the country.

"Opening up was a way to inject external pressure to stimulate reform domestically," he said, adding that as a result, every country aspired to climb higher on the value chain, with those on the highest end having to climb even faster.

Technology will be a key enabler for countries to restructure their economies so everyone can move up that chain together, he added.

In underlining the need for nations to ensure quality of life for their people, he said this includes taking care of the environment. "The global community needs to come together to address a number of challenges and protect our global commons," he added.

Another panellist, Canada's Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland, likened the rules-based world order to how a gardener tends to his garden while fending off a growing jungle. "We are starting to figure out how to navigate this new world and ways for the rules-based international order to fight back."

On the United States-China trade

conflict, Mr Heng expressed the hope that there will be an agreement between the two giants because the stakes are very high for the rest of the world as well.

The effects of their conflict are impacting global growth, with the International Monetary Fund cutting its forecast to 3.5 per cent for this year and 3.6 per cent for next year.

Their tariffs have also affected the global supply chain, he added.

"The global supply chain is so integrated that any form of change and disruption is going to bring very severe disruption," he said, citing chief executives at the forum.

Referring to how the trade tension, coupled with China's rising wages, had started moving the supply chain into countries south of China, including Vietnam and Cambodia, Mr Heng said: "There will be a reconfiguration of the supply chain, but I hope we can do it in a steady way."

While trade is important, technological superiority and the governance model are also vital in bring-

ing about a better quality of life for people, said Mr Heng.

He noted that more than 30 years ago, founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew predicted that as China's economy increases its weight in the global economy, there will be increasing tensions with the US.

"But the strategic competition that will take place is one thing. It is important for us to ensure that it does not result in strategic conflict because that will be quite a major problem for all of us."

He added: "I hope we can reach some understanding on that issue."

He went on to cite a metaphor he heard at an earlier session: "Imagine if all of us were on a plane and the pilot and co-pilot are fighting."

"I thought it was an interesting metaphor, but I hope that beyond the two pilots, we also have some autopilot that the rest of us can (rest our) hope on."

Professor David R. Gergen, founding director of Harvard University's Centre for Public Leadership, called on leaders to start preparing for the day when Mr Donald Trump is no longer president because the discontent and issues that brought him to power will still be there, and they pose a threat to democracy.

Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Kono suggested using technology to hear directly from voters as a way to overcome their discontent.

He said: "We have to trust the voters, give them power to make decisions and that they have to be responsible for what is decided."

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Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat speaking at the panel discussion at the World Economic Forum in Davos yesterday. With him were (from left) panel moderator and WEF president Borge Brende, Canada's Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland, Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Kono, South Korea's Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha and Professor David R. Gergen, founding director of Harvard University's Centre for Public Leadership. PHOTO: WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

China will continue to grow but at sustainable rate, says Wang Qishan

Tan Dawn Wei

Despite having just posted its worst economic growth figure in nearly three decades, China has not reached the end of its miraculous expansion, but will continue to grow at a sustainable rate.

Calling it an "indisputable fact", Chinese Vice-President Wang Qishan said yesterday that the world would benefit from China's continued economic progress, given how closely tied it is to the global economy.

Just last week, the world's second-largest economy reported 6.6 per cent growth for last year – its slowest in 28 years and a result of weaker domestic demand and punishing US tariffs.

Beijing has promised greater support for its economy this year, including bigger tax cuts for businesses and spending on infrastruc-

tural projects.

"Speed does matter. But what really matters is the quality and efficiency of our economic development," said Mr Wang, widely regarded as President Xi Jinping's right-hand man and a key figure in shaping China's foreign policy.

In his special address at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the 70-year-old also urged countries to press on with structural reforms to deal with widening income inequality and global developmental imbalances.

In a pointed reference to the United States ahead of crucial trade talks next week between the two countries, he said there was a need to accommodate the interests of all countries, especially those of emerging markets and developing nations.

"It is imperative to respect national sovereignty and refrain from seeking technological hege-



Addressing the World Economic Forum yesterday, Chinese Vice-President Wang Qishan urged countries to press on with structural reforms to deal with widening income inequality and global developmental imbalances. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

mony, interfering in other countries' domestic affairs and conducting, shielding or protecting technology-enabled activities that undermine other countries' national security," he said.

"We need to respect independent choices of the model of technology management and of public policies made by countries and their right to participate in the global technological governance system as equals."

One of the key sticking points of the trade negotiations has been over the US' accusations of China's forced technology transfers and intellectual property theft.

Describing himself as an opti-

mist, Mr Wang, who has held a number of financial posts and was responsible for driving Mr Xi's anti-corruption campaign, called for greater cooperation among developed and developing countries.

"What we need to do is make the pie bigger while looking for ways to share it in a more equitable way. The last thing we should do is to stop making the pie and just engage in a futile debate on how to divide it," he said. "Shifting blame for one's own problems onto others will not resolve the problems."

His speech bore similarities to a keynote address he made in Singapore in November, where he denounced unilateralism and urged the US to work with China to resolve their trade dispute.

He was also asked by host Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, about how US-Sino ties could be improved.

Perhaps not wanting to give too much away ahead of the trade negotiations, the usually forthcoming Chinese Vice-President would only reiterate that the two economies are "intertwined and mutually indispensable", and confrontation would harm both their interests.

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Abe, Merkel push for multilateralism to solve trade woes

DAVOS • Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said he will seek to use his chairmanship of the Group of 20 (G-20) leading economies to rebuild trust in the global trading system and foster consensus on ways to address climate change.

His speech to the World Economic Forum in the Swiss Alps yesterday was significant at a time when a bitter China-US trade dispute is one of several factors threatening to bring about a sharp slowdown in global growth.

"Japan is determined to preserve

and committed to enhancing the free, open and rules-based international order," he told delegates.

"I call on all of you... to rebuild trust towards the system for international trade. That should be a system that is fair, transparent and effective in protecting intellectual property rights and also in areas such as e-commerce and government procurement," he added in a veiled swipe at Beijing.

Mr Abe said Japan hoped to work with the United States and Europe to reform World Trade Organisa-

tion (WTO) rules so that they adapt to a rapidly changing environment.

"We have to make the WTO a more credible presence. We have to make reforms to make it more credible. Japan would like to play a leading role in WTO reforms," he added.

The WTO has been paralysed as the US, unhappy with what it says is the organisation's failure to hold Beijing to account for not opening up its economy, has blocked new appointments to the world's top trade court.

With the French, British and US

leaders cancelling their visits because of more pressing concerns at home, Mr Abe is one of only three Group of Seven leaders attending the annual event in Davos, where business executives are worried about the damage populism and trade protectionism are inflicting on the global economy.

Mr Abe's comments underscore Japan's hope to rally support from some of its G-20 counterparts to push for a multilateral approach in solving trade frictions. That could help Tokyo fend off pressure from

Washington to open up its politically sensitive agriculture market and take other steps to fix bilateral trade imbalances, analysts say.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel separately delivered a robust defence of the post-war multilateral order yesterday in a veiled criticism of US President Donald Trump's "America First" approach.

"(The Western world) has to act against the fragmentation of the international architecture and be ready to reform the existing institu-

tions," she said in her address in Davos. "I think we should understand our national interest in a way that we think about the interests of others, and from that, create win-win situations that are the precondition for multilateralism."

Mr Abe said Japan, as chair of this year's gathering of the G-20, hopes to build a group consensus on the need to reduce plastic waste flowing into the oceans and coordinate the global usage of digital data without infringing on personal privacy and intellectual property.

"Spending money on a green earth and a blue ocean – once deemed costly – is now a growth generator. We must invite more disruptive innovations before it is too late." REUTERS, WASHINGTON POST

Pompeo upbeat on positive end to US-China trade talks

DAVOS • United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo voiced his optimism for a good outcome to upcoming trade talks with China, and said a conflict between the superpowers could be avoided.

Mr Pompeo, speaking on Tuesday by video to the World Economic Forum, was referring to negotiations designed to avert a threat by US President Donald Trump to raise tariffs on US\$200 billion (S\$272 billion) worth of Chinese imports in March.

Mr Pompeo began by describing China as belligerent towards its neighbours and “embracing totalitarianism” at home, but said the row could be resolved if Beijing were to accept the principles of fair and open trade and protection of intellectual property.

“There are those who say a super-power conflict...is inevitable. We don’t see it that way,” he said.

Referring to the next round of trade talks, scheduled for next



Mr Mike Pompeo (on screen), addressing the World Economic Forum via video, and WEF president Borge Brende (on stage) at the annual Davos summit of big business on Tuesday. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Wednesday and Thursday in Washington, he added: “I am optimistic we will receive them well and we will have a good outcome from those conversations.”

His remarks chime in with Mr Trump’s comments last week-end that the talks were going well. However, the President denied he was considering lifting the tariffs.

The US-China trade war has roiled world financial markets and contributed to a slowdown in global economic growth. On Monday, China reported its weakest annual growth in nearly three decades, hurt by rising US tariffs,

and the International Monetary Fund cited the trade war in downgrading its global 2019 outlook for the second time in three months.

In a question-and-answer session, Mr Pompeo told the summit in Davos that he expected progress in nuclear talks with North Korea by the end of next month.

Mr Trump will hold a second summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un late next month, the White House said last Friday.

Mr Pompeo said he believed by the end of next month, “we will have another good marker along the way” with North Korea. He

added that the private sector would be an important player in reaching a final deal with North Korea, which is hungry for foreign investment.

He also said talks were needed with Russia to prevent nuclear proliferation, calling for Moscow to change its “outlook and behaviour”, and denied Washington had turned isolationist.

“We will need coalitions to build Middle East stability.” He added he was hopeful of making progress to end the war in Yemen, and noted that there were ways to encourage the Israelis and Palestinians to come together. REUTERS

Trump should resign, says former US secretary of state

DAVOS • When asked what he would say to President Donald Trump if he were seated next to him, former US secretary of state John Kerry hemmed and hawed a bit.

Then, Mr Kerry gave a one-word answer: “Resign.”

Mr Kerry, the Democratic nominee for the presidency in 2004, made the remark calling for the President to step down while speaking on a panel at the World Economic Forum (WEF) on Tuesday.

The audience of mostly elite business, academic and government leaders from around the world initially laughed at Mr Kerry’s comment, and then many clapped and cheered.

Mr Trump was supposed to attend the WEF to deliver an address on Tuesday, but pulled out because of the partial government shutdown that is now the longest in United States history.

“He doesn’t take any of this seriously,” Mr Kerry said on the panel, adding that he does not think Mr Trump has the ability to have deep conversations.

The White House did not respond to an immediate request for comment, but Mr Trump bashed the media for not understanding him and his approach to Davos.

“Last time I went to Davos, the Fake News said I should not go there. This year, because of the shutdown, I decided not to go, and the Fake News said I should be there. The fact is that the people understand the media better than the media understands them,” Mr Trump tweeted on Tuesday shortly before Mr Kerry’s call to resign.

Last year, Mr Trump received a warm welcome from the global elites at the WEF after legislation slashed business taxes and he scaled back regulations, moves that were heralded as pro-growth by many executives.

But this year, the vast majority of executives are frustrated by Mr Trump’s tariffs, which they see as a major threat to the global economy. They are calling on Mr Trump to end the trade war as the world economic slowdown appears to be getting worse.

More than a dozen members of Mr Trump’s Cabinet were supposed to be in Davos this year to meet other world leaders and clarify the Trump administration’s views on trade and foreign policy, but all of them stayed home because of the partial government shutdown that has left 800,000 workers without pay. WASHINGTON POST



Prince William (left) interviewing Sir David Attenborough, a broadcaster and naturalist, on climate change on Tuesday at the World Economic Forum. PHOTO: WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

ON CLIMATE CHANGE

We are now so numerous, so powerful, so all-pervasive...that we can actually exterminate whole ecosystems without even noticing it.



BRITISH NATURALIST AND BROADCASTER
DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

ON CHINA’S ECONOMY

Foreign executives expressed their concerns on some uncertainties such as the economic slowdown. To us, that is not a major issue because today’s China can no longer grow at a rate of 9 to 10 per cent.



MR XIAO YAOQING, chairman of China’s State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission.

ON EDUCATION

We need to teach kids to be creative and innovative, to do the things machines can’t do... The machines of the future have chips, but the humans have hearts. Education must move in that direction.



MR JACKMA, Alibaba Group Holding co-founder.

ON BREXIT

They don’t want that deal; they don’t want a no-deal. Now, it is time for them to tell us what they want – not only a negative opinion, but also a positive opinion.



EUROPEAN UNION ECONOMIC AND MONETARY COMMISSIONER
PIERRE MOSCOVICI, on Brexit and any extension of the process beyond March 29, when Britain is due to leave the EU.

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Dyson's move a sign of S'pore's attractiveness to global firms

Analysts cite stability, FTAs and IP protection as pull factors but say move alone unlikely to have big impact on economy

Seow Bei Yi
Business Correspondent

The shift of British technology company Dyson's head office to Singapore is a "significant and symbolic" move as it shows that the Republic – with its political stability, policy planning and free trade agreements (FTAs) – remains attractive to global brands.

This is despite the relatively high labour and land costs here, economists have told The Straits Times.

But they counselled perspective on the potential impact on Singapore's economy, noting that many of Dyson's higher-value research and development roles will remain in Britain. Singapore, they said, needs to maintain its competitive edge to remain attractive as a regional centre as neighbouring economies grow.

On Tuesday, Dyson, known for its bladeless fans and bagless vacuum cleaners, said that its corporate head office will relocate from Britain to Singapore, where a rising proportion of its executive team will be based.

Dyson chief executive Jim Rowan, however, denied in a media conference that the move had anything to do with tax benefits or Brexit uncertainties, which have been cited as hurting business confidence in the British economy.

Instead, with all of Dyson's manufacturing and most of its future investments set to be in Asia, Mr Rowan said being in Singapore will help the firm put in its best effort to secure opportunities and keep an eye on investments.

Dyson is not the first major business to base its global headquarters here in recent years. In 2017, Japan's big three shipping lines announced that their new joint venture, Ocean Network Express, would house its global headquarters in Singapore.

Mr David Leong, managing director of human resource firm PeopleWorldwide Consulting, hopes an "indirect employment effect" will ripple through supporting industries for Dyson's manufacturing and operations here, such as those of its upcoming electric car plant.

It plans to set up the plant by next year, and launch its first model by 2021.

Noting that Dyson has plans to double the size of its research and operations here, Mr Leong said this may mean the creation of jobs, which could include roles such as research scientists, engineers and technicians.

Maybank Kim Eng senior economist Chua Hak Bin said, however, that Dyson's move alone is unlikely to have a significant impact on Singapore's economy, although it is symbolic as it shows the Republic remains attractive to global brands despite competition from others such as Hong Kong. Pull factors, he added, include Singapore's intellectual property protection.

CIMB economist Song Seng Wun pointed to Singapore's FTAs with countries such as the United States as a reason companies set up base here. The Republic's FTA with the European Union is pending approval, he added.

"Even though it may not be the cheapest place to do business, its infrastructure, political stability... are important in a world of rising protectionism and policy flip-flops," he said. "Singapore is stable for businesses, especially those planning big investments... They don't have to worry about unexpected regime changes or massive policy shifts."

Labour economist Walter The-seira said one should not read too much into Dyson's move as there is no indication it will relocate its research and development here.

He hopes, however, that the shift can boost plans to develop a greater R&D and advanced manufacturing presence in Singapore.

"As China is rapidly ageing, increasingly, the world is seeing that South-east Asia is a potentially strong engine for growth," he said.

"The question is whether Singapore will remain attractive as a regional centre (compared with cities like Bangkok and Jakarta, which may be closer to high-value markets).

"To remain competitive, we have to ensure our links with regional economies are strong, and that means being open to talent flows and regional work assignments."

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Dyson, known for its bladeless fans and bagless vacuum cleaners, is moving its corporate head office from Britain to Singapore. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

Dyson snapshot

2018 FINANCIAL RESULTS

- Profit grew to £1.1 billion (\$\$1.95 billion), a 33 per cent rise from the year before, breaking the £1 billion mark for the first time.
- Turnover was up 28 per cent at £4.4 billion.

PRODUCTS

- Dyson technology is available in more than 80 markets globally.

SOME KEY SITES

- Technology campuses in Malmesbury and Hullavington in Britain.
- Technology centres in Shanghai and Singapore.
- Advanced manufacturing facilities in Singapore and the Philippines, as well as the Malaysia Development Centre in Senai, Johor.
- Since ceasing UK production of its domestic appliances in 2003, Dyson has been manufacturing in Asia and has facilities in Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines.

MANPOWER NUMBERS

- 12,000 employees globally, with 4,500 in Britain.
- More than 5,800 engineers and scientists in its global R&D team.
- Employs 1,100 staff in Singapore, 350 of whom are engineers and scientists.
- Global average age of a Dyson engineer: 26.

Dyson is not the first major business to base its global headquarters here in recent years. In 2017, Japan's big three shipping lines announced that their new joint venture, Ocean Network Express, would house its global headquarters in Singapore.

Public backlash in Britain over relocating HQ

Arvind Jayaram

British technology company Dyson has been hit by a public backlash over its decision to move its headquarters to Singapore, with many in Britain labelling its billionaire founder, Sir James Dyson, a hypocrite.

Mr Dyson was one of the prominent voices from the business world who supported the campaign for Britain to leave the European Union (EU), arguing that the country would benefit from being outside the bloc.

Though he stated that the decision announced on Tuesday was not related to Brexit, a number of politicians and ordinary citizens slammed him for "betrayal of the public".

Many noted that the move comes in the wake of Singapore signing a free trade deal with the EU, whereas Britain's post-Brexit trading relationship with the EU remains unclear.

Mr Sam Gyimah, a Conservative MP, delivered scathing criticism on Twitter. "Dyson's decision to move his HQ to Singapore reflects his narrow business interest. This is not just a transfer of two people. When HQs move, so does the intellectual property. Betrayal of the public who put their faith in him as a British business advocating a no-deal Brexit," he wrote.

Labour lawmaker Wes Streeting accused Mr Dyson of "rank hypocrisy" on Twitter, alleging that he has "no sense of responsibility to his workers or to his country".

Mr Jason Beattie, head of campaigns at the Daily Mirror, noted: "Dyson group paid £155 million



Dyson's billionaire founder, Sir James Dyson, was one of the key voices from the business world who backed the campaign for Britain to leave the EU. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

(\$\$275 million) in tax in the UK in 2017 and £388 million in 2016. Money which could fund schools, hospitals and universities now going to the Singapore treasury."

Mr Tom Kibasi, director of the Institute for Public Policy Research in Britain, wrote on Twitter: "James Dyson's lack of social obligation is an utter disgrace. His business succeeded because of this country. Complete absence of gratitude to workers, taxpayers, innovators, creators. Shameful."

A large number of users urged Britons to boycott Dyson products over the decision.

"Does anyone else feel like they have been mugged off, or is it just me? There was #Dyson making out that #Brexit would be great, next thing we know, he mumbles about future-proofing his business and scuttles off. Let's hope #British consumers have long memories, Mr Dyson," wrote @riceytravels.

Others called for Mr Dyson to

return his knighthood or for it to be rescinded.

Dr Jennifer Cassidy, a politics lecturer at Oxford University, tweeted: "The wealthy like James Dyson belong to a Britain that, for most, simply doesn't exist. They speak of freedom, of sovereignty, of borders. But for so many, freedom is having food on the table, a roof over your head and safety for your family. This is something they will never know."

Despite the majority of voices on

social media attacking the decision to relocate, there was some support for the company.

"Dyson hasn't deserted Britain... two senior executives are moving to Singapore and there is no impact on UK production or research and development. This is pretty desperate stuff from the Remain lot. If anything, it is a sign that the UK must become more competitive," wrote Twitter user @darrengimes_.

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Growing proportion of exec team moving here

Home appliance manufacturer Dyson is moving its corporate head office to Singapore, along with a growing proportion of its executive team.

Chief financial officer Jorn Jensen and chief legal officer Martin Bowen will both relocate from Britain.

Mr Roland Krueger will join Dyson in April, having been president of Infiniti Motor Company. He is set to be based in the Republic to oversee all aspects of Dyson's automotive project.

Mr Krueger took on the role as president of Infiniti Motor Company and senior vice-president of Nissan Motor – Infiniti's parent company – in 2015.

Before joining Infiniti, he was a senior vice-president at BMW Group and regional head of operations in the German market.

Meanwhile, Mr Jensen has been Dyson's chief financial officer since 2017, according to his profile on Bloomberg. Previously, he was deputy chief executive and group chief financial officer for Carlsberg.

Mr Bowen took on his current role as Dyson's group general counsel in 2009 and is responsible, among other things, for formulating legal strategy, assessing risk as well as negotiating and structuring investments and acquisitions, according to his LinkedIn profile.

He is also part of the executive team as company secretary.

Seow Bei Yi

British Parliament inches closer to delaying Brexit

LONDON • The British Parliament is moving closer to a plan to delay Brexit, to stop the country from dropping out of the European Union with no deal and to avoid the risk of an economically damaging divorce.

The main opposition Labour Party is increasingly likely to support a proposal to extend the March 29 exit deadline if Prime Minister Theresa May fails to nego-

tiate a divorce agreement, said Mr John McDonnell, the party's chief finance spokesman.

He described the proposal as a sensible way to avoid the upheaval of a disastrous no-deal Brexit.

"I actually do believe that we are facing, with a no-deal, potentially quite catastrophic consequences for people's living standards – that is why we have said

we have got to avoid it," he told the BBC's Newsnight television programme. "I think there is a majority in Parliament for avoiding no deal."

If Labour does support the proposal – put forward by lawmakers including Ms Yvette Cooper, a former minister – it is far more likely to win enough backing to be passed. That would force Mrs May's

hand and ensure she cannot take Britain out of the EU without a deal in nine weeks' time.

Mrs May said attempts to delay Brexit did not address the underlying decision about how Britain should leave the EU.

"The decision remains the same – no deal, a deal or no Brexit," she told Parliament yesterday.

Brexit is at an impasse, with Members of Parliament overwhelmingly opposed to the divorce agreement Mrs May has negotiated with the EU and time running short for delivering an orderly separation.

If Parliament refuses to endorse the exit terms, Britain will be on course to fall out of the EU with no agreement on March 29 – an

outcome the British authorities say could deliver as much as a 25 per cent hit to the pound and a 30 per cent hit to house prices, risking a recession.

Last week, Mrs May's deal was rejected in the biggest defeat suffered by a British government in the House of Commons in recent history. In the week since she lost the vote, she has tried – and so far failed – to reach a cross-party consensus on the way forward.

She is pinning her hopes on persuading the EU to back down and make changes to the terms of Britain's departure.

With the prospect of any significant alterations to the deal seeming unlikely, MPs are taking matters

into their own hands.

The EU's executive said yesterday that the bloc would do its utmost to avoid extensive border controls between EU member state Ireland and the British province of Northern Ireland regardless of how Brexit goes, a spokesman said.

The Irish border issue remains the biggest obstacle to a divorce deal being agreed between Britain and the EU in the countdown to Brexit.

Mr Margaritis Schinas, the European Commission's chief spokesman, told a news conference: "The EU is determined to do all it can – deal or no deal – to avoid a hard border in Ireland."

BLOOMBERG, REUTERS

Travel treats from SIA for all ST Singaporean of the Year finalists

Pair of business class tickets to destination of choice for winner, economy tickets for others

Rahimah Rashith

From flying to the United States for the Burning Man arts and music festival to a recce in Nepal for a volunteer trip – these are some of the things that nominees for the Singaporean of the Year are intending to do with plane tickets sponsored by Singapore Airlines (SIA).

The Singaporean of the Year winner will receive a pair of business class tickets to a destination of choice sponsored by SIA, while the other 10 finalists – whether individuals or groups – will each get a pair of economy class tickets to a destination they choose.

Ms Lee Yueh Chern, SIA's senior manager of public affairs, said: "Singapore Airlines is proud to be one of the sponsors for the Singaporean of the Year award, which honours extraordinary acts of goodwill, ingenuity or perseverance by Singaporeans who have made an effort to create a positive impact in our society and beyond."

"As national carrier and a home-grown brand, we are delighted to partner with The Straits Times to celebrate the achievements of Singaporeans who have inspired many in their various fields of work or interest."

The winner will also receive \$20,000 and a trophy, while the other finalist teams will each get \$5,000, among other prizes. The prize money is sponsored by UBS Singapore bank.

The other sponsors are car importer Tridente Automobili, Millennium Hotels and Resorts, and electrical and household appliance company Osim.

Technopreneur Annabelle Kwok, founder of an artificial intelligence company, hopes to go to the annual Burning Man arts and music festival in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada.

"Most people think it is just a hippie event, but in a 70,000-people event across nine days, a lot of chance encounters and conversations can happen," she said.

Charity founder and entrepreneur Elizabeth Tan, 33, who organises annual mobile eye clinics for poor communities living in remote regions of the Himalayas, said she intends to use the tickets for a recce trip to Nepal or Bhutan.

"These are places that we are planning to take our projects to so that we can reach out to other communities with a similar demographic," she said.

Mr Kenneth Thong, 47, and his wife Adeline, 39, who share their home with young people in need for free, said the tickets would bring them closer to a vacation with the youth under their roof, hopefully to South Africa.

South Africa was where the couple volunteered over a decade ago. "With these tickets, we will be a step closer to taking the kids on a trip so that they can enjoy themselves and experience a

vacation," he said.

The Singaporean of the Year winner will be announced at a ceremony at the Istana on Feb 12.

President Halimah Yacob will be the guest of honour.

rahimahr@sph.com.sg

THE STRAITS TIMES
SINGAPOREAN
OF THE YEAR 2018

PRESENTED BY



Left: Mr Kenneth Thong and his wife Adeline hope the tickets would bring them closer to a vacation in South Africa with the youth under their roof.

Top right: Technopreneur Annabelle Kwok hopes to attend the annual Burning Man arts and music festival in Nevada.

Right: Charity founder Elizabeth Tan plans to use the tickets for a recce trip to Nepal or Bhutan.
ST FILE PHOTOS



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MS LEE YUEH CHERN, SIA's senior manager of public affairs.

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WORLD



PRIYANKA GANDHI
GANDHI DYNASTY SCION ENTERS
INDIA'S POLITICAL FRAY **A13**

Drone sightings temporarily halt flights at US airport

Operations at New Jersey airport resume after 90 minutes; incident being investigated

WASHINGTON • Reports of drone sightings in northern New Jersey temporarily halted plane arrivals at Newark Liberty International Airport on Tuesday, but normal operations have since been resumed, officials said.

A spokesman for the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) earlier said flights into Newark – the 11th-busiest US airport – were briefly suspended after two drones were seen flying at 3,500 feet (1,067m) over nearby Teterboro Airport, a small regional airport about 27km away which handles mostly corporate jets and private planes.

The federal agency said information about the drone sightings was turned over to law enforcement.

The FAA's Air Traffic Control System Command Centre briefly

issued a ground-stop at Newark, citing "drone activity", according to a document posted on its website.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which operates Newark and Teterboro airports, later said on Twitter that normal operations had resumed and that it was coordinating with the FAA and law enforcement authorities as they investigate the incident.

United Airlines, the largest carrier at Newark, said it was aware of the reports of drone activity and was working with the airport and the FAA. It said the impact on its operations had been minimal.

The issue of drones impacting commercial air traffic has taken on new urgency after reports of drone sightings in Britain affected air travel.

Earlier this month, flights from London's Heathrow airport were halted for about an hour after a drone was sighted near Europe's busiest air hub.

Gatwick Airport, London's second-busiest airport, was severely disrupted last month when drones were sighted on three consecutive days, resulting in about 1,000 flights being cancelled or diverted and 140,000 passengers affected.

Both airports responded to the Gatwick incident by ordering military-grade anti-drone technology.

Earlier this month, the US Transportation Department proposed rules that would allow drones to operate over populated areas and end a requirement for special permits for night use – long-awaited actions that are expected to help speed up commercial use.

The Trump administration noted that there are nearly 1.3 million registered drones in the United



NEWARK LIBERTY AIRPORT

Take-offs from Newark were halted, and inbound planes were held in the air after a drone was spotted over nearby Teterboro Airport. The first notice of a halt to flights was issued at 4.52pm. Just after 7pm, officials said normal operations had resumed at Newark Liberty, ending a disruption that lasted about 90 minutes. It was unclear how many passengers were affected by the disruption.



GATWICK AIRPORT

Drones were sighted on three consecutive days at London's second-busiest airport last month, causing severe disruptions to airport operations. It resulted in about 1,000 flights being cancelled or diverted and 140,000 passengers affected.

PHOTOS: EPA-EFE, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

States and more than 116,000 registered drone operators.

But officials say there are hundreds of thousands of additional drones that are not registered.

The US Congress last year gave

the Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security new powers to disable or destroy threatening drones after officials raised concerns about the use of drones as potential weapons.

In September 2017, a small civilian drone struck a US Army UH-60M Black Hawk helicopter near Staten Island, New York. The helicopter landed safely but there was some damage. REUTERS



Garuda Robotics chief executive Mark Yong briefing Senior Minister of State for Transport and Health Lam Pin Min (centre), ITE CEO, Ms Low Kah Gek, and Science Centre Singapore CEO, Associate Professor Lim Tit Meng, at the inaugural Drone Technology for Urban Solutions conference yesterday. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

In S'pore, tightened laws on drone use still under review

DRAW OF THE DRONE

If you told your neighbour you were planning on buying a plane and flying it around your estate, they would probably call the police. But if you told them you were buying a drone... they might just ask if they can join you...



MR MARK YONG, chief executive of drone flight management software firm Garuda Robotics.

Lester Wong

Singapore's drone regulations are being beefed up. Changes proposed by the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS) last April and which are still being reviewed include a compulsory online training programme, a pilot licensing scheme, as well as stricter requirements such as partial or full certification for heavier unmanned aircraft of more than 25kg, which presents a greater safety risk.

CAAS head of unmanned aircraft systems Melvin Wong said yesterday: "With the technological advancements in unmanned aircraft over the past four years and given its increasing popularity, we felt it was timely to review and enhance the current regulatory framework."

He was speaking at the inaugural Drone Technology for Urban Solutions

conference at the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) College Central.

The use of drones has again come under scrutiny, just a month after more than 1,000 flights were forced to be diverted or cancelled last December after drones were spotted around Gatwick Airport, Britain's second-largest airport, with 140,000 people affected.

On Tuesday, a pair of drones spotted near Newark airport in the United States halted traffic at the second-largest airport in the New York metropolitan area.

Existing Singapore regulations ban the flying drones within 5km of airports or military airbases, or at altitudes above 200 feet (about 60m), without a permit.

Those found guilty face a fine of up to \$20,000 or up to 12 months in jail, or both.

The Republic of Singapore Air

Force has several weapons at its disposal, including a jammer gun, which emits signals that can jam the control signals of drones, as well as a drone catcher system, which uses a net to catch them.

In Parliament recently, Senior Minister of State for Transport and Health Lam Pin Min also announced that CAAS plans to develop a system to monitor unmanned aircraft. It will allow CAAS to check if individual drones are operating under a valid permit, and issue alerts to pilots who fall foul of regulations.

Laws, however, must go alongside educating the growing base of drone users on the need to follow regulations for safety's sake, industry players said.

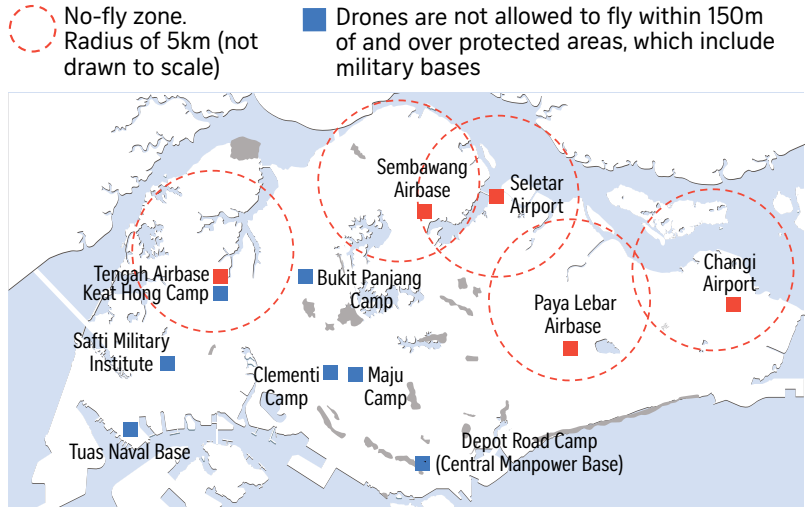
"If you told your neighbour that you were planning on buying a plane and flying it around your estate, they would probably call the police," said Mr Mark Yong, chief executive of drone flight management software firm Garuda Robotics.

"But if you told them you were buying a drone to do the same thing, they might just ask if they can join you, since they don't understand the risks."

lesterw@sph.com.sg

Drone rules in Singapore

WHERE YOU CAN'T FLY DRONES



- Drones cannot be flown in parks and nature reserves overseen by National Parks Board**
- | | |
|--|---|
| Admiralty Park
Ang Mo Kio Town Garden East
Ang Mo Kio Town Garden West
Bishan Park
Bukit Batok Town Park
Bukit Batok Nature Park
Bukit Timah Nature Reserve
Clementi Woods
Dairy Farm Nature Park
Dhoby Ghaut Green
East Coast Park
Esplanade Park
Fort Canning Park
HortPark | Jurong Central Park
Kallang Riverside Park
Kent Ridge Park
Labrador Park
MacRitchie Reservoir Park
Mount Faber Park
Singapore Botanic Gardens
Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve
Telok Blangah Hill Park
Tiong Bahru Park
Toa Payoh Town Park
West Coast Park
Zhenghua Park |
|--|---|

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

On the back of the growing use of drones and unmanned aircraft (UA) in Singapore, the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore is proposing enhancements to laws governing their use to ensure public safety.

Weight of UA	For recreational/research purposes	For non-recreational/non-research purposes
7kg and below	Proposed: Successful completion of online training programme, if flying UA of total mass of more than 1.5kg	• Class 2 Activity Permit, if flown outdoors: – in a restricted or danger area, or – within 5km of an aerodrome/military airspace, regardless of operating height, or – above 200 feet (60m) beyond 5km of an aerodrome/military airspace
Above 7kg, but not more than 25kg	Proposed: UA Pilot Licence Removed: Operator Permit	• Operator Permit • Class 1 Activity Permit Proposed: UA Pilot Licence
Above 25kg	Proposed: UA Type Certificate/Certificate of Airworthiness Proposed: UA Operator Certificate Proposed: UA Pilot Licence Removed: Operator Permit	

Source: CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY OF SINGAPORE STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Coastal towns urged to run their own tsunami sensors

Jakarta criticised for not heeding geologists' warnings of likely volcano-linked tidal wave

Wahyudi Soeriaatmadja
Indonesia Correspondent
In Jakarta

Geologists have urged that communities along the coastal areas facing the Sunda Strait and hit by last month's deadly tsunami be roped in to run their own tsunami warning sensors and undertake their maintenance as well.

They have also criticised the central government for failing to follow up on at least two studies by notable geologists who had predicted the Anak Krakatoa volcano could someday spawn a deadly tsunami.

In his call to involve the local communities, Dr Roger Scoon, a fellow of the Geological Society of London, said they "are more organised and technically skilled than we envisage and they could manage this well".

"Locally based sensors would do the trick," he added in an e-mail reply to The Straits Times this week.

The Dec 22 tsunami was triggered by a chunk of fiery Anak Krakatoa collapsing and slipping into the ocean.

It killed more than 400 people and injured over 7,000 when giant waves hit Banten and Lampung

provinces, which are along the coastline of the Sunda Strait where the volcano island is located. The strait separates Java from Sumatra.

All the victims were Indonesians, many of whom were on holiday.

Indonesia's early warning system for tsunamis failed to raise the alarm because it is built to detect tsunamis from earthquakes, said its Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency.

Last month's tsunami, however, arose from a volcanic eruption, which is uncommon in the country.

A tsunami warning system has two equally important parts: a network of sensors, which uses buoys or anchored floats, to detect abnormal changes in sea level, and communications infrastructure that issues alarms for people to evacuate.

To aggravate matters, vandals have persistently damaged or removed many of the buoys.

To overcome the problems, Dr Scoon said, local residents could do the system's maintenance work, including guarding the warning equipment against vandalism.

While agreeing with Dr Scoon on roping in regional governments, Dr Danny Hilman Natawidjaja, of Indonesia's Institute of Sciences, said



The scene in Tanjung Lesung, Banten province, in the aftermath of the Dec 22 tsunami that hit the west coast of Java. In his call to involve the local communities, geologist Roger Scoon says they "are more organised and technically skilled than we envisage and they could manage this well". PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

help from the central government is still needed, especially in the training and hiring of experts.

"Every region has its own characteristics that require specific designs of early warnings. To leave it all to the national government would overwhelm Jakarta. It's time regional governments took part and contributed," Dr Danny told The Straits Times.

"The corporate sector could also contribute. For example, Banten has a strong presence of companies in the chemical industry. Bear in mind, a natural disaster could blow up their facility," he added.

The geologists, in blaming the Indonesian government for the Dec 22 disaster, pointed to several studies that had predicted the danger from the Anak Krakatoa volcano.

A 2012 study said a tsunami could be triggered by a collapse of Anak Krakatoa's flank as the volcano sits

REGIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Every region has its own characteristics that require specific designs of early warnings. To leave it all to the national government would overwhelm Jakarta. It's time regional governments took part and contributed.



DR DANNY HILMAN NATAWIDJAJA, of Indonesia's Institute of Sciences.

partly on a steep wall of the caldera resulting from the famed Krakatoa volcano eruptions in 1883.

The study, done by geologists T. Giachetti, R. Paris, K. Kelfoun and B. Ontowirjo, was published in a journal of the Geological Society of London.

Using a numerical model, it simulates both Anak Krakatoa landslides and the tsunami propagations, detailing the tsunami's possible travel time and wave amplitude when hitting various coastal areas.

These areas, it added, include Sumur, Carita, Labuan and Anyer in Banten province, on the western tip of Indonesia's most populous island, Java, and parts of Lampung province, on the southern tip of the country's second-most populous island, Sumatra.

They were hit hardest by the Dec 22 calamity.

A similar study was done in Yog-

yakarta, using a tsunami simulation lab, said Dr Danny.

But Indonesia's national geological agency's secretary Antonius Ratdomopurbo, when contacted, said it was not possible to keep track of all the studies that had been done.

"There are a lot of them," he said. "One thousand pieces of research, and one of them is correct. How do we go about this?"

Disagreeing, Dr Scoon said the number of credible studies is very small. "This (the 2012 study) is a top-quality article in a reputable journal, and it should have been given full attention," he added.

Agreeing, Dr Danny told The Straits Times: "There aren't many such research studies. Let the government and general public not being aware of such studies be our learning lesson."

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Jakarta's former governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, popularly known as Ahok, in this photo taken just after he was sentenced to two years' jail in May 2017 for blasphemy against Islam. His lawyer Teguh Samudera said on Tuesday that Basuki has plans to get into the oil business, in addition to hosting a TV show. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Ahok – ‘call me BTP’ – to be released from prison today

Former Jakarta governor to get out earlier for good behaviour, plans talk show, may even be remarrying

Linda Yulisman
Indonesia Correspondent
In Jakarta

Jailed former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama will be released today, with projects such as hosting a talk show, travel plans, and perhaps even a new bride awaiting him.

Law and Human Rights Minister Yasonna Laoly said on Tuesday that Basuki will be released from the Mobile Brigade Command detention centre in Depok, West Java.

Mr Yasonna would not say when exactly the 52-year-old will be released, only that it will take place “during working hours”.

Basuki will then need to settle administrative matters at Cipinang prison in East Jakarta, where he was held before being transferred to Depok for security reasons.

The Christian-Chinese politician, who was sentenced to two years' jail for blasphemy against Islam, is getting an early release mainly due to remissions given for his good behaviour, officials have said.

The former governor, widely known by his Chinese nickname Ahok, recently asked supporters to

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

His name, Ahok, has an ethnic association. Is his request to people to call him BTP because he wants to appear more Indonesian?



MSSHINTYA KURNIAWAN, who works in a humanitarian organisation.

refer to him as BTP instead.

In May 2017, a Jakarta court sentenced him to two years' jail after finding him guilty of insulting Islam. It was another blow as he had lost the race for governor to former culture and education minister Anies Baswedan a few weeks earlier.

In April last year, he formally divorced his wife of more than 20 years, Madam Veronica Tan, after a court found sufficient evidence of her infidelity.

However, Basuki, known for his tough-speaking style, still has many supporters.

Ahead of his release, there have already been media reports and a lot of chatter online about him hosting a talk show and being invited to speak in several countries.

There is also talk that he will marry a police officer next month.

A big Basuki supporter, Ms Tjuk Sudiarti, is very happy about his release and said she will watch that moment on television.

“Hopefully, he will have a happier life out there,” she said.

Last year, the 78-year-old, together with her daughter and friends, visited Basuki in the Depok Centre, where he joked about becoming a stand-up comedian and

spoke about travelling overseas.

“I hope he returns to work as a government official, but I know many people might not like him,” said the mother of three, who admires Basuki for his “discipline, honesty and firmness” which brought breakthroughs, such as bureaucratic reforms, when he was governor.

Ms Shintya Kurniawan, who works in a humanitarian organisation, is curious to know why he wants to be referred to as BTP.

“His name, Ahok, has an ethnic association. Is his request to people to call him BTP because he wants to appear more Indonesian?” the 34-year-old wondered.

Like Ms Sudiarti, she would like Basuki to continue working in government. “I think, with all his experience, skills and power, he will make a greater contribution by working in the public sector,” she said, suggesting options such as government adviser or chief graft-buster.

Basuki's lawyer Teguh Samudera said on Tuesday that Basuki has plans to get into the oil business in addition to hosting a TV show, Antara reported.

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UPS AND DOWNS OF HIS CAREER

2004

He becomes a member of the regional legislative council in his native East Belitung Regency, Bangka Belitung islands province, through New Indonesia Alliance Party. He quits after only a few months.

2005

Runs for regional election and becomes East Belitung Regent. He is known as a reform minded-leader, building roads, providing free healthcare services and improving educational services.

2006

Resigns as regent to run in gubernatorial election.

2007

Loses gubernatorial election.

2008

Joins Golkar Party.

2009

Elected as a lawmaker for a five-year term.

2012

Backed by Gerindra, he advances in Jakarta gubernatorial election with then Surakarta Mayor Joko Widodo, who is supported by Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P). He becomes deputy governor.

September 2014

Resigns from Gerindra over disagreement with party's position on Regional Election Bill. The move is also attributed to Mr Joko's move to challenge Gerindra chief Prabowo Subianto in the presidential election.

November 2014

Becomes Jakarta governor after Mr Joko is elected Indonesian president.

September 2016

PDI-P throws support behind Ahok's re-election bid. In a pre-election speech later the same month, Ahok accuses his rivals of using a Quranic verse to trick voters into not voting for him.

December 2016

Faces trial for blasphemy.

April 2017

Loses Jakarta gubernatorial election to Gerindra-backed Muslim candidate Anies Baswedan.

May 2017

Sentenced to two years' jail for blasphemy.

April 2018

Divorces wife of more than 20 years, Madam Veronica Tan.

Jan 24, 2019

Released from jail.

Linda Yulisman

‘Bashir must fulfil conditions to walk free’

Wahyudi Soeriaatmadja
Indonesia Correspondent
In Jakarta

The fate of Abu Bakar Bashir is now in his own hands, even as a review of an earlier decision to release the convicted terrorist leader is under way, said a senior aide to President Joko Widodo.

Mr Bey Machmudin said yesterday that Bashir will need to decide if he is willing to submit to the government's conditions before he can be granted early release from his 15-year jail term.

“The President did not say ‘cancel’,” said Mr Bey, who is deputy to the state secretary in charge of state protocol and media affairs at the Istana. “It is all up to Abu Bakar Bashir now, as there are conditions that must be met (before he can be freed).”

He was commenting on reports in local media yesterday that Mr Joko had called off Bashir's release.

The President had on Tuesday said Bashir would be released from prison only if he pledged allegiance to the Republic of Indonesia and the state ideology Pancasila, as is required of all reformed terrorists.

Mr Joko said he had left it to Bashir and his family to decide on this, while a government team – consisting of relevant security ministries, police and Indonesia's counterterrorism agency – which has been tasked to review legal aspects of a possible conditional release for Bashir, is still looking into the matter.

Some local reports, citing Presidential Chief of Staff Moeldoko, who goes by just one name, as saying that the plan to free Bashir had been cancelled, “because the requirements could not be negoti-

ated”. Mr Moeldoko was referring to the plan to give Bashir a conditional release as was first announced last Friday, before the government backtracked and formed the review team.

Mr Bey said the offer to release 80-year-old Bashir was based on humanitarian aspects, while the existing law must be upheld.

Law Minister Yasonna Laoly told reporters on Tuesday that the government review team was studying and evaluating Bashir's ideology and checking his concept of the Republic of Indonesia, as any terrorist inmate granted a parole must be loyal to the nation.

Mr Joko faced widespread criticism after a legal adviser on his presidential campaign said Bashir, the spiritual leader of South-east Asia terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), would be given an unconditional release, based on humanitar-

ian grounds due to his deteriorating health.

JI was responsible for the 2002 Bali bombings, Indonesia's deadliest terrorist attack in which 202 people were killed, 88 of them Australians.

The move to release Bashir drew strong criticism both domestically and internationally – especially from Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison – with Bashir still seen as a threat. Bashir has been in jail since his arrest in 2009, and was in 2011 sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment for funding a terrorist training camp in Indonesia's westernmost province of Aceh.

Critics of the contemplated parole for Bashir claim the decision to release him was politically motivated, with Mr Joko seeking to burnish his Islamic credentials.

wahyudis@sph.com.sg



President Joko Widodo has ordered a review into the decision of the early release on medical grounds of jailed radical cleric (left) Abu Bakar Bashir, 80, the mastermind of the 2002 Bali bombings. The President had on Tuesday said Bashir would be released from prison only if he pledged allegiance to the Republic of Indonesia and the state ideology Pancasila. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Priyanka Gandhi enters Indian politics

Brother Rahul makes her general secretary of key committee in Congress party

NEW DELHI • Ms Priyanka Gandhi, a scion of India's most prominent political family, has formally entered politics ahead of a general election due in May, Indian media reported yesterday.

Mr Rahul Gandhi, her brother and president of India's main opposition Indian National Congress party, appointed her general secretary in the All India Congress Committee (AICC) – the party's central decision-making assembly – for the eastern part of the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.

"Honourable Congress president has appointed Shrimati Priyanka Gandhi Vadra as AICC general secretary for Uttar Pradesh East," the party said in a statement signed by general secretary Ashok Gehlot, as quoted by The Statesman.

"She will be taking charge with effect from the first week of February 2019," the party said.

"I am very pleased personally that my sister, who is very capable, will work with me," Mr Gandhi, 48, told reporters.

Ms Gandhi is from the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty that has given India three prime ministers, including Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister.

Her father, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, also served as prime minister, and her grandmother, Mrs Indira Gandhi, was the first female prime minister of the country.

Congress workers have long been demanding that Ms Priyanka Gandhi, 46, who resembles the charismatic Indira Gandhi, should take up an official position in the party. Ms Gandhi has always had a say in strategising electoral campaigns and preparing the candidate list for the Congress, but did not previously have a formal position in Congress.

"The responsibility given to Priyanka-ji is very important. This will not only have an effect on eastern Uttar Pradesh but also other regions," senior Congress leader Motilal Vohra said, as reported by The Statesman newspaper, using a term of respect for Ms Gandhi.

Businessman Robert Vadra, Ms Gandhi's husband, took to Facebook to congratulate her.

"Congratulations P... always by



Party workers have long wanted Ms Priyanka Gandhi (above), who resembles Mrs Indira Gandhi, to have an official position. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

your side in every phase of your life. Give it your best," Mr Vadra said in the post.

India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and other parties have often criticised the Congress party for what they term "dynastic politics", DPA reported yesterday.

While Ms Gandhi will oversee the Congress party's efforts in Uttar Pradesh East, Mr Jyotiraditya Scindia – a Member of Parliament representing the Guna constituency in the state of Madhya Pradesh – was given charge of the

western part of Uttar Pradesh state. Uttar Pradesh sends the largest number of lawmakers in the country to Parliament – 80 – and often plays a critical role in deciding who forms the government.

Uttar Pradesh East is also home to the holy city of Varanasi, which forms part of the constituency of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Though the state was once a stronghold, the Congress party has performed poorly there in recent times, winning only two seats in the 2014 general election.

Party (BJP) is in the majority, in August last year passed a Bill giving any NRI registered to vote the power to delegate his vote to a representative in India. The representative will have to change for every state or general election.

The Bill is currently pending in the Upper House, where the opposition Congress party has asked for more debate amid concerns over voter fraud.

Political analysts said that if the Bill passes, it would open up a sizeable chunk of the vote, particularly for the Modi government.

But many believe it might not go into effect for the forthcoming general election, due to take place in three months.

There are more than 10 million NRIs with Indian passports spread across the world. Currently, only a fraction – 24,348 – are registered to vote, and most are from the southern state of Kerala.

"If that becomes part of law, they would be of significant influence. But I don't think the government is going to be in a position to put everything in place before these elections," said foreign policy analyst Lalit Mansingh.

"But NRIs now feature prominently in our foreign policy and in domestic policy. Mr Modi has given an even greater emphasis whenever he has gone abroad and addressed NRIs as part of foreign policy initiative."

More than any other prime minister, Mr Modi has made reaching out to the diaspora a priority since he came to power.

He has met them in special events in almost every country he has visited.

In 2014, he addressed a nearly 20,000-strong crowd of Indian Americans at Madison Square Garden. A year later, in 2015, a crowd of 18,000 greeted him at the Expo in Singapore.

gnirmala@sph.com.sg

Modi reaches out to Indian diaspora ahead of polls

Nirmala Ganapathy
India Bureau Chief
In New Delhi

The Modi government has rolled out the red carpet at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD), a biennial gathering for the Indian diaspora, which has taken on added significance this year amid an attempt to widen voting rights for non-resident Indians (NRIs) ahead of a general election this year.

Mr Narendra Modi, who is working towards giving wider voting rights to NRIs, on Tuesday inaugurated the 15th PBD Convention 2019 by hailing members of the diaspora as "brand ambassadors" for the South Asian country.

In what was almost a campaign speech, he listed the achievements of his government, which included curbing corruption and disbursing cash benefits to the poor.

"In the last four years, India has made huge progress and left its mark in the world. Earlier, they said India can't change – we have reversed the situation," said Mr Modi.

He also said the government was working towards making it easier to obtain visas and passports, including introducing chip-based versions. Yesterday was the last day of the convention.

This year's PBD is taking place in Varanasi, one of the holiest Hindu cities which also happens to be Mr Modi's constituency.

Some 4,000 NRIs and Persons of Indian Origin are participating in

the PBD, whose theme this year is The Role Of Indian Diaspora In Building New India.

In conjunction with the event, the government is arranging home-stays and planning to take participants to view the Kumbh Mela in Prayagaraj, in Uttar Pradesh, and watch the Republic Day parade in the capital on Saturday.

Indians make up one of the world's largest diaspora, with more than 25 million of them living in different parts of the world, including in Singapore, Malaysia, the United States and Canada.

Last year, a special PBD was held in Singapore to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the dialogue partnership between India and Asean. The Modi government has been trying to give NRIs who retain Indian passports greater voting rights.

The Lower House of Parliament, where Mr Modi's Bharatiya Janata

Analysts said if a Bill on greater voting rights for the Indian diaspora passes, it would open up a sizeable chunk of the vote, particularly for the Modi government. But many believe it might not go into effect for the forthcoming general election.

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China’s disaster, relief agencies now operating under one roof

Restructuring completed a year after formation of new ministry

Lim Yan Liang
China Correspondent
In Beijing

China has centralised 13 government departments dealing with disaster-related work under one umbrella ministry to improve their co-ordination, and said it will beef up its disaster prevention and early warning systems this year, it announced on Tuesday.

The completion of the task by the new Ministry of Emergency Management comes a year after it was formed.

The ministry’s Vice-Minister Sun Huashan said the move includes absorbing more than 200,000 firefighters that were once part of China’s military and public security fire departments, and the setting up of 31 province-level emergency management bureaus. He added that more than 1.7 million earthquake-resistant homes were built by the authorities last year, benefiting about 5.4 million people.

At the same time, another eight million people were relocated away from disaster-prone areas.

The ministry was created by Beijing during the country’s annual par-

liamentary session last March, as part of the largest government restructuring since China opened up in 1978. The restructure was to remove overlaps in responsibilities among ministries and agencies.

It coincides with the 10th anniversary of the devastating Wenchuan earthquake in southwestern China that killed 70,000 people and showed up glaring inadequacies in the country’s disaster response infrastructure.

Besides integrating the China Earthquake Administration, the ministry also took over geological disaster prevention from the Ministry of Land Resources, disaster relief from the Ministry of Civil Affairs and drought and flood control from the Ministry of Water Resources, among others.

Mr Zheng Guoguang, who is also vice-minister of emergency management, said the past year has shown the effectiveness of a central agency, instead of disparate agencies in charge of specific areas.

For instance, with both Tropical Storm Rumbia and Typhoon Mangkhut last year, the ministry sent working groups to south and east China respectively before they made landfall. The specialists worked with local rescue teams to minimise deaths by hastening rescue and resettlement work, he said.

As a result, the death toll and direct economic loss from Mangkhut



A firefighter and a rescue dog taking part in an earthquake rescue training at a base in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, China. PHOTO: REUTERS

The priority China has given to disaster prevention and relief stands in stark contrast to the attacks levelled against United States President Donald Trump last week for trying to divert funds earmarked for disaster relief.

were, respectively, only 17.5 per cent and 22 per cent of the average of those caused by the last three similar super typhoons, the ministry said.

“Compared with the past, we are quicker in both rescue work and disaster relief,” Mr Zheng said. “This includes allocation of relief supplies and financial aid from the central government... and protecting lives and property.”

The number of dead and missing from natural disasters last year fell 60 per cent from the average five years ago, the ministry added.

The priority China has given to disaster prevention and relief stands in stark contrast to the attacks levelled against United States President Donald Trump last week by both the governor of Puerto Rico and Democratic lawmakers for trying to divert funds earmarked for disaster relief.

The White House had directed the US Army Corps of Engineers to determine how much of the US\$13.9 billion (\$\$18.9 billion) in emergency funds for Puerto Rico could be redirected to build a border wall with Mexico.

Experts, such as Mr Eric Holde-

yanliang@sph.com.sg

Beijing wipes out 9,300 apps, blasts Tencent’s news service

HONG KONG • China is stepping up its efforts to rein in the country’s Internet, singling out Tencent’s popular news app for spreading vulgar information while shutting down more than 700 websites and thousands of apps in the span of just three weeks.

The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) has scrubbed the Web of more than seven million items since Jan 3, deleting more than 9,300 smartphone apps to screen out information deemed inappropriate or harmful, the watchdog said in a notice distributed to the media.

Tencent’s Tian Tian Kuai Bao, which means quick daily news, was singled out for spreading “vulgar and low-brow content that was harmful and damaging to the Internet ecosystem”, the agency said.

The regulator also criticised Huaban, a photo-sharing social network, as having “serious ecosystem problems”.

Huaban said on its website that its online service had been temporarily taken down for upgrades.

The latest raft of shutdowns, part of a six-month campaign intended to eradicate “vulgarity” from the domestic Internet, stands out for its scale and speed.

Search engines Baidu and Sohu were ordered to suspend a plethora of news services just weeks ago.

Beijing has increasingly taken a hard line as the country’s Internet ecosystem flourishes, instigating crackdowns on video games and social media that have hurt industry leaders, such as WeChat operator Tencent and the world’s largest start-up, ByteDance.

Control of the Internet has tightened under Chinese President Xi Jinping – an effort that has accelerated since 2016, as the ruling Communist Party seeks to crack down on dissent in the booming social media landscape.

The moves represent the most severe digital crackdown in China’s history, shuttering services or temporarily forcing them from app stores for spreading everything from crude jokes to banned information.

Last November, the CAC scrubbed 9,800 social media accounts of independent news providers for violations that included spreading politically harmful information and falsifying the history of the Communist Party.

Tencent, whose shares fell 0.8 per cent in Hong Kong, said it could not immediately comment.

BLOOMBERG, REUTERS

HK moves to make disrespect of Chinese anthem a crime

HONG KONG • Hong Kong yesterday presented a controversial Bill to lawmakers that prescribes jail terms of up to three years for disrespecting the Chinese national anthem, a move critics say raises fresh fears over freedom of expression in the city.

The Chinese authorities have strived to instil greater patriotism in the former British colony at a time of heightened tension between democracy activists and forces loyal to Beijing, with some in Hong Kong even advocating independence from China.

Besides imprisonment, the measure would fix a maximum fine of HK\$50,000 (\$\$8,700) for those who publicly and intentionally disrespect the anthem, March Of The Volunteers.

It also extends to schoolchildren, including pupils of international schools, who would be legally required to learn the anthem.

“I think teachers would feel worried about this proposal, because if we allow this government to pass a law to instruct the teachers on what to teach, well, this time it is for the national anthem, maybe next time it could be other things,” said secondary school teacher Simon Hung, 36.

Small groups of pro-democracy



A pro-democracy activist passing a placard depicting part of the musical score of the Chinese national anthem, during a protest outside the Legislative Council in Hong Kong yesterday. The protest was against a proposed law that prescribes jail terms of up to three years for disrespecting the anthem. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

and pro-Beijing protesters taunted each other outside the Legislative Council, shouting and chanting through loudhailers.

Waving the red Chinese flag, pro-Beijing demonstrators held up banners that read: “Safeguard national dignity” and “Support the national anthem law”, while democracy activists held placards that said: “Unsung freedom”.

Booing the anthem at football matches in Hong Kong has emerged as a form of political protest in the past few years, seized

upon by young people keen to demonstrate their frustration at Beijing’s perceived creeping influence.

The global financial hub returned to Chinese rule in 1997 under a “one country, two systems” formula that promises the city a high degree of autonomy, including freedom of expression.

The anthem proposal is expected to pass easily when it comes to a vote – probably before the summer – as the opposition does not have enough seats to block routine legislation.

Besides imprisonment, the measure would fix a maximum fine of HK\$50,000 (\$\$8,700) for those who publicly and intentionally disrespect the anthem, March Of The Volunteers.

Hong Kong has already outlawed the desecration of national flags and emblems, which can attract jail terms of three years.

Calls for outright independence are a red line for China’s Communist Party leaders, who deem Hong Kong an inalienable part of the nation.

But many young people in Hong Kong have become increasingly angered by what they see as China’s encroachment on the city’s culture and autonomy, with some advocating “localism”, or a Hong Kong

identity, rather than a Chinese one.

“We have no sense of belonging to China at all,” one football supporter said.

“Even people I know who were born since 1997, they still think they are Hong Kongers, not Chinese.”

In 2017, China adopted a law banning disrespect for the anthem.

A similar measure is being reviewed in Macau, a former Portuguese-run enclave that returned to Chinese rule in 1999. REUTERS

First baby in China born from womb donated by grandmother

XI’AN (China) • A Chinese woman who successfully received a womb donated by her mother after a uterus transplant in November 2015 gave birth to a healthy baby boy in north-west China’s Shaanxi province on Sunday.

Weighing 2kg and measuring 48cm long, the baby is considered to be China’s first and the world’s

14th baby to be born from a transplanted womb, said doctors with the Xijing Hospital in Xi’an, where the baby was born and the uterus transplant was performed.

Named by Chinese media as Yang Hua, the new mother, 26, was born without a uterus but has her own ovaries which produce eggs.

When the mother-daughter

womb transplant, also China’s first human womb transplant, was done in 2015, Ms Yang was 22 years old and her mother, 43.

Uterus transplants are not new. In the 1960s, Britain and the United States began to experiment with uterus transplants on animals.

In 2000, the world’s first human womb transplant took place on a

26-year-old woman in Saudi Arabia. The transplanted uterus failed after three months and had to be removed.

Dr Chen Biliang, director of the obstetrics and gynaecology department of Xijing Hospital, said uterus transplants remain a medical challenge in the world today.

The uterus, with plenty of tenu-

ous blood vessels, grows in the depths of a woman’s pelvic cavity.

Therefore, a string of problems, including cutting, the structure of the blood vessels during the transplant, and strong reactions from any rejection may occur, said Dr Chen.

There are about one million women in China who are suffering

from uterine infertility.

Due to the limitation of the current assisted reproductive technology and the prohibition of surrogacy in many countries, uterus transplants have provided an effective way for women plagued by uterine infertility to have their own babies, said Dr Chen. XINHUA

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Indonesia battles to clean up trash-strewn rivers

PISANG BATU RIVER (Indonesia) • Boys played and chatted on a rickety wooden ramp under a baking sun in West Java, while just below their feet flowed one of Indonesia's most horribly polluted rivers, clogged with hundreds of tonnes of smelly trash.

The authorities in the nation of 260 million are battling a lack of recycling culture or environmental awareness to achieve an ambitious target of a 70 per cent cut in marine plastic debris by 2025, despite having devoted US\$1 billion (S\$1.36 billion) a year to the task.

"Every time it rains and floods, the whole village goes down to help with the trash and clean the river," said Tarumajaya resident Marzuki, who like many Indonesians goes by only one name, on the banks of the Pisang Batu river that carries waste from villages upstream.

"We never get tired of it, but the trash never stops coming."

Yet the river is just one of many thickly carpeted with trash formed mostly of plastic waste, of which Indonesia churns out about 3.2 million tonnes each year, with nearly half ending up in the sea, a 2015 study in the journal Science showed.

The archipelago of more than 17,000 islands is estimated to be the world's second-largest contributor of plastic pollutants in the oceans after China, the study added.

"Even though we've brought an armada of 25 garbage trucks that take three turns every day, the reality is... we haven't cleared even half of it," said Tarumajaya village security chief Suseno.

As Java struggles with its rivers, the resort island of Bali banned the use of plastic bags by large supermarkets and grocery stores this year, a measure it aims to widen to smaller shops. Yet that caused its own backlash.

"I've seen people protest because they didn't get plastic bags after they shopped," said one supermarket shopper, Mr Thomas Wibowo, adding that he understood the need to cut back. "But if we are suddenly forbidden from using plastic, as Indonesians, we'd be shocked."

The risks to marine life were graphically highlighted in November, when a dead sperm whale washed ashore in eastern Indonesia with 6kg of plastic waste in its stomach.

"I think this is also a global issue, not just a national problem," said Mr Ida Bagus Rai Dharmawijaya Mantra, the mayor of Bali's capital of Denpasar. "I've seen that a lot of citizens are accepting and helping of this movement, including tourists. They too want to help replace plastic bags." REUTERS



A boy using a bamboo stick to clean a river covered by rubbish in Bekasi, West Java, earlier this month. The river is among several in Indonesia thickly carpeted with trash formed mostly of plastic waste. The country is battling a lack of environmental awareness to achieve an ambitious target of a 70 per cent cut in marine plastic debris by 2025. PHOTO: REUTERS

Trump won't soften hard line on China: Advisers

Forced technology transfers, IP theft still top priority for US leader

WASHINGTON • As much as US President Donald Trump wants to boost markets through a trade pact with China, he will not soften his position that Beijing must make real structural reforms – including how it handles intellectual property (IP) – to reach a deal, advisers say.

Offering to buy more American goods is unlikely by itself to overcome an issue that has bedevilled talks between the two countries. Those talks are set to continue when Chinese Vice-Premier Liu He visits Washington at the end of this month.

The US accuses China of stealing intellectual property and forcing American companies to share technology when they do business in China. Beijing denies this.

With a March 1 deadline approaching to reach an agreement or risk an escalation of tariffs on another US\$200 billion (S\$272 billion) worth of Chinese goods, the two sides are still far apart on key structural elements critical for a deal, according to sources.



Chinese Vice-Premier Liu He is visiting Washington at the end of this month, to continue trade talks between the US and China.

"We are not yet in a position where our concerns have been addressed sufficiently," one US official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. He said the Trump team, led by hardline US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, was focused on such structural issues as well as trade imbalances.

White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow told Reuters that forced technology transfers, IP theft and ownership restrictions remained a top priority for Mr Trump. "The President has said many times how crucial that is and he's not going to back down," Mr Kudlow said.

Lack of progress led the Trump administration to decline an in-person meeting with a lower-level Chinese delegation for preparatory talks ahead of Mr Liu's visit, said a source familiar with the situation.

The Financial Times reported that an offer for a preparatory meeting was rejected, but White House officials pushed back on the suggestion that any meeting was cancelled.

"With respect, the story is not true," Mr Kudlow told CNBC, referring to the FT report. "The teams remain in touch in preparation for high-level talks with Vice-Premier

Liu He at the end of this month," said White House spokesman Lindsay Walters.

Mr Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed on a ceasefire in their trade war at the Group of 20 meeting in Buenos Aires last year, setting a 90-day period to discuss differences and agree on a deal. The talks have yet to produce anything on paper.

Mr Trump has painted developments in the US-China trade talks as largely positive, aware of the effect that the tensions have had on stock markets.

The S&P 500 registered its biggest four-week percentage gain since 2011 last Friday after dropping nearly 20 per cent from its record September close on Christmas Eve.

"We've really had a very extraordinary number of meetings and a deal could very well happen with China. It's going very well," Mr Trump told reporters at the White House last Saturday.

China has offered more than US\$1.2 trillion in additional commitments on trade, Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin said last month. That is not sufficient for Mr Trump or his team.

"To think that this is going to end with simple 'commitments' is overlooking the historical experience that we've had," the US official said.

Chinese officials pledged to buy enough US products to wipe out the US-China trade deficit at talks in Beijing earlier this month, but also hedged its position, saying it depended on the demands of Chinese companies, said Dr Scott Kennedy, director of the Project on Chinese Business and Political Economy at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

The Chinese have indicated they feel they have already addressed US concerns about IP rights through a new law and other actions, he added.

"These weren't sufficient to satisfy the US negotiation team. So we'll see if the Chinese give any more on those or if they still try to focus on sweetening the purchases side, and hoping that Trump bites on the potential big numbers," he said.

Barring progress at the end of the 90-day period, the Trump administration is scheduled to increase tariffs on US\$200 billion worth of Chinese goods from the current 10 per cent to 25 per cent.

"All I'll say is the meetings coming up at the end of the month with Liu He are very important," Mr Kudlow said. REUTERS

Australia seeks info on missing writer in China

SYDNEY • Australia is investigating the whereabouts of one of its citizens, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) said yesterday, after a newspaper report raised fears that the former Chinese diplomat had been detained in China.

The Sydney Morning Herald newspaper reported yesterday that friends feared Mr Yang Hengjun, an author and former Chinese envoy who is now an Australian citizen, had been detained because he had not been reachable for several days.

His disappearance comes at a time of high tension between China and some parts of the West after two Canadians, a diplomat on unpaid leave and a consultant, were arrested in China on suspicion of endangering state security.

Those arrests were widely seen in the West as retaliation by Beijing for the arrest of Meng Wanzhou, Huawei Technologies' chief financial officer, in Canada on Dec 1. She is accused of violating US sanctions on Iran.

Two friends contacted by Reuters said they had reported Mr Yang as missing to DFAT. They said he was supposed to fly from New York to Guangzhou in southern China last Friday.

One of those friends, Mr Feng Chongyi, an academic at the University of Technology in Sydney, said Mr Yang had been scheduled to fly on to Shanghai but never arrived.

"I believe he is under the custody of the Ministry of State Security in Beijing," Mr Feng said.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Hua Chunying, asked about Mr Yang's disappearance, told a regular briefing that she "did not know" about his situation and "needs to get more information from the relevant departments".

China's Ministry of Public Security did not respond immediately to requests for comment.

A DFAT spokesman confirmed the department was investigating but did not identify Mr Yang by name.

"The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is seeking information about an Australian citizen who has been reported missing in China," the spokesman said.

A source familiar with the investigation said Australia made contact with Chinese officials overnight to ask about Mr Yang's whereabouts.

Australia joined international condemnation of the arrest of the two Canadians, but Mr Yang has long been in the sights of the Chinese authorities. He has criticised what he described as Chinese interference in Australia.

Mr Yang had worked in the ministry of foreign affairs in Hainan province, but later left for Hong Kong in 1992 and the US in 1997, where he worked for the Atlantic Council think-tank.

He later took up Australian citizenship – although Beijing does not recognise dual nationality – and wrote a series of spy novels and a popular Chinese-language blog.

Once described as China's "most influential political blogger", Mr Yang went missing before in 2011, describing his disappearance as a "misunderstanding" when he resurfaced days later.

Tensions have also been strained between China and Australia in recent months. Australia banned Huawei from participating in its 5G network in August over security fears. The United States and New Zealand have taken similar steps against the telco. REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

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Seoul protests after Japan jet flies over warship

It is the third incident since last Friday, says South Korean general, as tensions mount

SEOUL • A Japanese patrol aircraft made an “intimidating” pass over a South Korean warship yesterday, in what South Korea’s military said was a “clear provocation” towards a friendly neighbour.

The aircraft made its flight just over the South Korean navy vessel in waters off the south-west coast of the Korean peninsula, even after the aircraft determined the ship’s identity, the South Korean military said, according to Reuters. “Today’s low-altitude flight was a clear provocation against a ship of a friendly country, and we cannot help but doubt Japan’s intentions and strongly condemn it,” General Suh Wook of South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff told a news briefing.

South Korea’s Defence Ministry said it called in a defence official from Japan’s embassy to lodge a protest. “If this behaviour is repeated again, we will sternly respond according to our military’s rules of conduct,” Gen Suh said.

Japanese government and defence force spokesmen were not immediately available for comment.

South Korea’s Yonhap news agency quoted Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga as saying he was aware of Seoul’s announcement and that it was important the two countries maintained communication.

Yesterday’s encounter follows a December feud in which Japan complained that a South Korean destroyer locked a targeting radar on a Japanese surveillance plane.

Seoul denied the claim, saying the plane needlessly approached the ship, which was on a normal rescue mission.

There have been two other flights by Japanese aircraft near South Korean vessels since last Friday, which prompted a South Korean request to Japan to stop such incidents, Gen Suh said.

Defence officials from the two sides have been meeting, but Japan decided to halt the talks, Japanese media reported on Monday.

The two countries’ foreign ministers were due to meet yesterday on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Animosity between South Korea and Japan looks set to worsen in the lead-up to the 100th anniversary of Korea’s 1919 independence movement against Japanese rule on March 1, as diplomatic spats over issues such as comfort women and forced wartime labour have deepened in recent months.

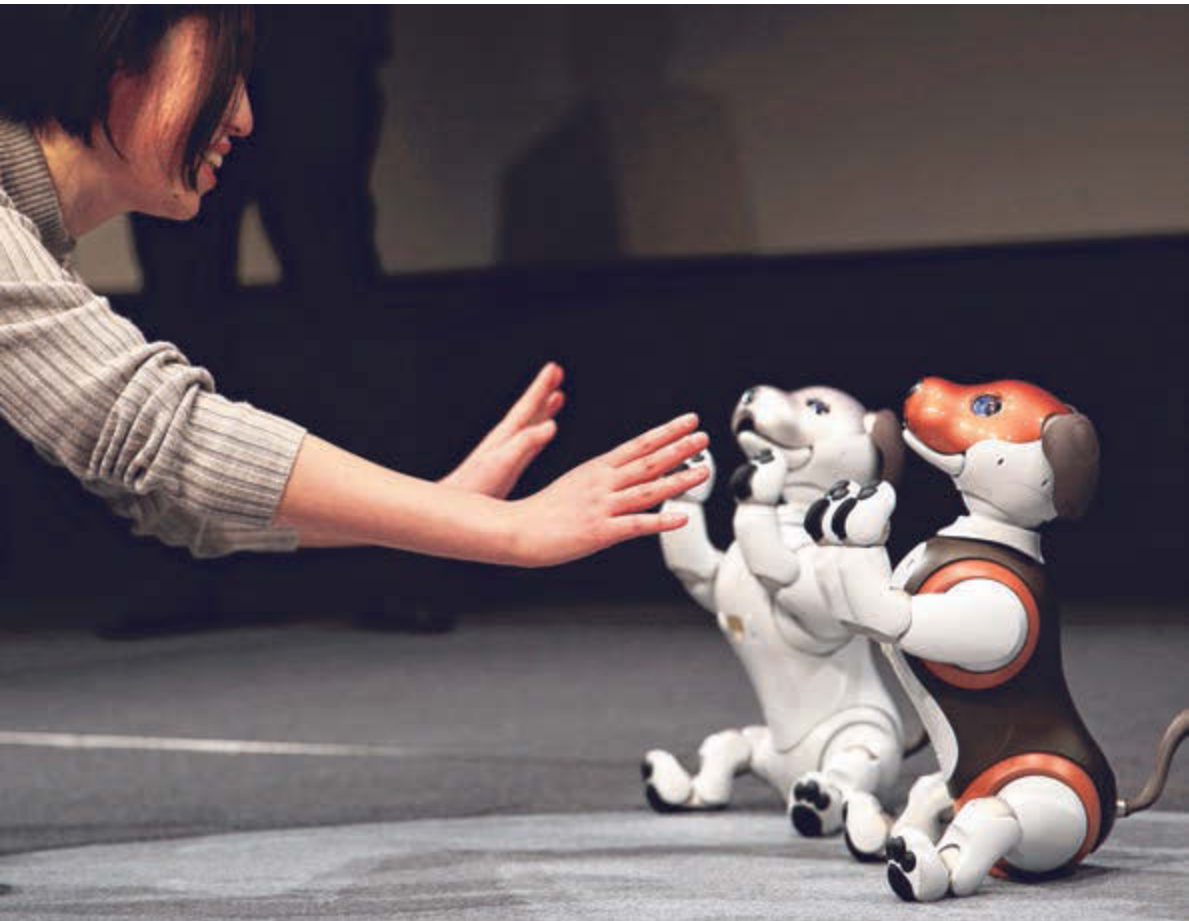
The two US allies share a bitter history that includes Japan’s 1910-45 colonisation of the Korean peninsula and the use of comfort women – Japan’s euphemism for girls and women, many of them Korean – who were forced to work in its wartime brothels.

The rows over wartime history have long been a stumbling block for relations between the neighbours, sparking concern about regional efforts to rein in North Korea’s nuclear programme.

Ties have taken a further beating after South Korean victims of forced labour successfully sued for damages against Japanese companies Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries for exploitation during Japan’s colonial rule.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has asserted that the rulings were “extremely regrettable”, but South Korean President Moon Jae-in has hit back, accusing Japan of trying to politicise the issue and turning it into a controversy.

Sony’s Aibo robot dog gets home patrol duty



The latest version of Sony’s Aibo robotic dog is equipped to roam around the house, checking on people or pets, and send progress reports via smartphone to family members or owners located elsewhere. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

TOKYO • Sony’s puppy-size robot dog Aibo, equipped with cameras, artificial intelligence and Internet capability, can now remotely check on family members, children and even pets, the Japanese electronics giant said yesterday.

The 30cm-long robo-pup with flapping ears and cutting-edge LED eyes will roam around the home at pre-designated times looking for family members.

However, the latest canine technology does not come cheap, with each dog costing nearly US\$3,000 (S\$4,080) for a three-year package, including software services such as data storage.

The owner will receive progress reports via smartphone through the service, which will be offered from next month in conjunction with home security firm Secom.

Project chief Izumi Kawanishi said at the Sony headquarters in Tokyo: “You will be able to check how remote family members are doing or what children are doing when they get home. We aim to make you feel a bit more secure by living with Aibo and having fun.”

The gadget will also be able to watch over real pets in the future, thanks to image recognition and learning capabilities, he said.

The latest Aibo model, which can display “emotions”, was released in January last year and sales hit 20,000 in the first six months, according to Sony.

In the era of the Internet of Things and facing a rapidly ageing population, Japan has mobilised rice cookers, electric pots and other household devices to keep watch on elderly people living alone.

They transmit data to families living far away on how often they have been used. If they have not been used for a while, it could be regarded as an ominous sign.

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Indian navy opening third island airbase with eye on China

Aim is to beef up surveillance of Chinese ships entering Indian Ocean via Malacca Strait

NEW DELHI • India's navy will open a third airbase in the far-off Andaman and Nicobar Islands today to beef up surveillance of Chinese ships and submarines entering the Indian Ocean through the nearby Malacca Strait, military officials and experts said.

New Delhi has grown concerned over the presence of China's bigger navy in its neighbourhood, as well as the network of commercial ports the East Asian country is building in an arc stretching from Sri Lanka to Pakistan that India fears could become naval outposts.

The Indian military has seized upon the Andamans that lie near the entrance to the Malacca Strait to counter the Chinese challenge,

deploying ships and aircraft since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office in 2014 promising a more muscular policy.

Indian navy chief Sunil Lanba will commission the new base, called INS Kohassa, about 300km north of the archipelago's capital, Port Blair, the navy said in a statement.

The facility, the third in the islands, will have a 1km runway for helicopters and Dornier surveillance aircraft.

But eventually the plan is for the runway to be extended to 3km to support fighter aircraft and longer-range reconnaissance aircraft, navy spokesman D. K. Sharma said.

About 120,000 ships pass through the Indian Ocean each year and nearly 70,000 of them pass through the Malacca Strait.

"The underlying thing is the expanding Chinese presence. If we have to really monitor Chinese presence, we need to be adequately equipped in the Andaman islands," said former navy commodore Anil Jai Singh.

"If you have airbases, you can cover a larger area," he said, adding that he expected the navy to permanently deploy more ships to the islands in the next phase of the build-up.

A Chinese submarine docked in Sri Lanka's Colombo port in 2014 drew such alarm in New Delhi that Mr Modi's government raised the issue with the Sri Lankan authorities.

Both India and China have been locked in a contest for influence, with New Delhi trying to push back



STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

against Beijing's expansive diplomacy in the region.

This week, Indian defence officials are due to hold talks with the defence minister of the Maldives, Ms Mariya Ahmed Didi, with New Delhi seeking to repair ties after the ouster of its pro-China leader in a presidential election last year.

Ex-PM Najib trolls govt with music video

PETALING JAYA • Former Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak continues to troll the Pakatan Harapan government on social media, this time by releasing a music video.

Narrating and singing in Malay to the tune of Kiss And Say Goodbye by The Manhattans, the Pekan MP pokes fun at the ruling coalition using revised lyrics.

In a soft sing-song voice before the song begins, Najib says: "This is the saddest day of my life. Since May 9, 2018, I was ousted. All this while, I have been fighting for the people who I really love."

He was referring to the date of the last general election, which his Barisan Nasional coalition lost after ruling for over six decades.

Accompanied by about 15 other people in the studio, Najib then launches into the song, singing and swaying. The lyrics appear to mock the performance of the government since May, saying: "Hopes as high as mountains but crushed to become dust, I believed in you, all your promises."

Najib, who faces dozens of charges relating to criminal breach of trust, abuse of power and money laundering related to

troubled state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad, appears to be gaining online followers as he shrugs off the allegations hanging over him and posts jibes about rival politicians.

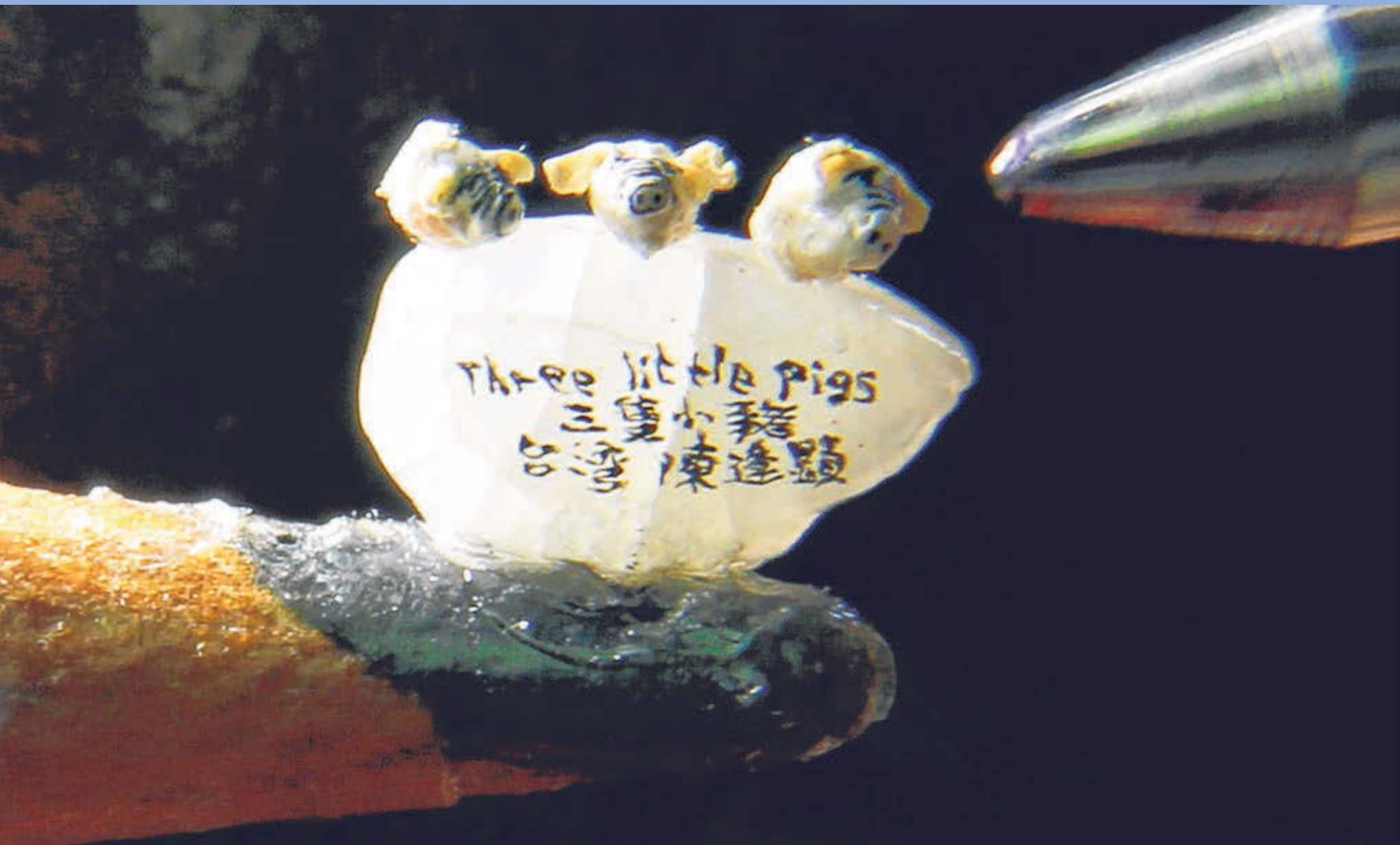
Meanwhile, another set of allegations dogged Najib yesterday, when a cousin of murdered Mongolian woman Altantuya Shaariibuu testified in the Shah Alam High Court that Ms Altantuya had showed her a photo of herself, her lover Abdul Razak Baginda and a deputy premier named Razak.

Ms Burmaa Oyunchimeg was giving evidence in the family's RM100 million (S\$33 million) lawsuit against the Malaysian government over Ms Altantuya's death in 2006. Najib, who was deputy prime minister in 2006 and advised by Mr Abdul Razak when he was defence minister, reiterated yesterday that he had never met Ms Altantuya.

"That is slander. Lies. I never met her," he said, according to the Malaysiakini news site.

Ms Altantuya was killed in a forest in Shah Alam with a shot to the head before her body was blown up with explosives.

Something to squeal about: Three really little pigs



Taiwanese Chen Fornng-shean is making it big with his tiny works of art. He has carved a miniature sculpture of three little pigs based on the children's fable. The pigs, each about 1mm in width and height, are placed on a single grain of rice and seen on a pencil tip. The 63-year-old artist created the pigs ahead of the Year of the Pig, which starts next month. Mr Chen, who has been carving miniature zodiac animals for more than 20 years, has created some 200 works of art. PHOTO: REUTERS

Driver, 21, in deadly Penang Bridge crash surrenders

BUKIT MERTAJAM (Penang) • A 21-year-old hairstylist who allegedly crashed his car into a sport utility vehicle (SUV) on the Penang Bridge that sent it plunging into the sea has surrendered to the police, a Penang police officer said yesterday.

Central Seberang Prai police chief Nik Ros Azhan Nik Abdul Hamid said the young man, who lives in Taman Inderawasih on mainland Penang, turned himself in at 2am yesterday.

The man, who sustained injuries in the incident, was initially warded at the Seberang Jaya Hospital. He then sought further treatment at a private hospital on the island.

"He was accompanied by family members to the police station.

"He was subsequently arrested and is now in the lock-up to assist in investigations," Assistant Commissioner (AC) of Police Nik Ros said.

The man is currently detained at the district police headquarters in Bandar Perda.

A three-hour post-mortem examination conducted on the 20-year-old SUV driver Moey Yun Peng, who was found in the submerged SUV, revealed the cause of death as "drowning in an individual involved in a road traffic collision".

The case is now classified under Section 41(1) of the Road Transport Act 1987 for reckless driving and causing death, AC Nik Ros said. The case was initially investigated under Section 42(1) of the Road Transport Act 1987 for reckless driving.

"Police have so far recorded 15 statements over the case from various parties," he added, saying the suspect will be released later on police bail.

On Sunday at about 3am, Mr Moey was driving across the bridge to Butterworth from Penang island in the SUV when a black sedan slammed into his rear left flank at high speed, causing his car to spin and flip over the bridge's parapet.

Police have determined that Mr Moey and the driver of the black sedan were friends who had earlier attended another friend's birthday party at a club in Chulia Street in George Town.

Rescuers on Tuesday retrieved the white SUV from under the bridge in a 20-minute operation.

The badly mangled car was hoisted using four cables attached to a crane yesterday evening.

The operation took about 20 minutes.

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Ms Carolyn Kerr, who owns The Battered Wife, said she chose the name to raise awareness about domestic violence. PHOTO: THE BATTERED WIFE/FACEBOOK

Aussie eatery forced to close after backlash over name

INNISFAIL (Queensland) • A fish and chips shop in Australia's Queensland state has been forced to shut down following months of criticism and boycott over its controversial name.

The Battered Wife, which had come under fire for its name last year, was slammed by the community, politicians and non-profit organisations for supposedly encouraging domestic violence.

The shop in the town of Innisfail is owned by Ms Carolyn Kerr, a former police officer who named her business after coming out of an abusive relationship in 2017.

She said she chose the name back then not to make light of the issue but to raise awareness, according to broadcaster ABC.

"I've been around domestic violence," she was quoted as saying. "I was a police officer way back when, and after that domestic violence liaison through courts, and then I found myself in a situation where I was in that as well and I just thought, 'you know, it's my little stand to try to make awareness'."

But she had to break it to her patrons via a Facebook video on Tuesday that the shop is ceasing operations before the end of the month.

The announcement came after Ms Kerr was told by an organisation that bricks would be thrown at her shop's window, among other threats. She did not name the organisation in the video.

"With deep, deep sadness, I inform you that we will cease operations next week. As many of you know, I've been the subject of an abusive witch-hunt by a not-for-profit organisation," she said.

"They threatened to throw bricks at our window, complained to have our business name revoked... (and) complained to industrial relations and child protection services, anonymously of course, saying that I was employing kids and participating in child exploitation."

In 2017, The Battered Wife's official Facebook page shared a post clarifying that domestic violence is not a joke.

Ms Kerr also shared a picture of her with a black eye in the shop's official page, saying that she got it after stepping in and protecting a woman from an abusive partner.

Others, however, do not agree with her defence.

The Attorney-General of Queensland Yvette D'ath, for one, was horrified by the shop's name. "The business is completely out of step with what the community's expectations are," she said in the ABC report.

The latest blow that made Ms Kerr decide to close the business was when anonymous complaints were made to Australia's Fair Work Commission about the alleged exploitation.

TAKING A STAND

I've been around domestic violence. I was a police officer way back when, and after that domestic violence liaison through courts, and then I found myself in a situation where I was in that as well and I just thought, 'you know, it's my little stand to try to make awareness'.



MS CAROLYN KERR, a former police officer who named her business after coming out of an abusive relationship in 2017.

Bleeding risks may offset aspirin's benefit

Cardiovascular benefits linked to drug are modest among those who are healthy: Study

TAMPA • Should healthy people take aspirin to ward off heart disease?

The notion has been controversial and the medical advice mixed. But a review of scientific data on the topic showed that any benefits are slight and counterbalanced by a matching rise in bleeding risks.

Aspirin is a blood thinner and can help prevent clots that may lead to heart attack or stroke. But it also boosts the risk of haemorrhage in the brain, stomach and intestines.

"When considering the totality of evidence, cardiovascular benefits associated with aspirin were modest and equally balanced by major bleeding events," said the report by researchers at King's College Hospital in London.

The study was published on

Tuesday in the Journal of the American Medical Association (Jama). The meta-analysis examined 10 prior studies involving a total of more than 164,000 people with an average age of 62.

The researchers compared aspirin users to those who do not take aspirin and found "significant reductions" in strokes, heart attacks and deaths from cardiovascular disease among those who took it.

Aspirin use was also linked to an increased risk of "major bleeding events, compared with no aspirin", it said.

Statistically, the benefits were close to the risks.

If 10,000 people without heart disease took no aspirin for a year, 61 of them would have a heart attack or stroke, explained Professor

Kevin McConway, emeritus professor of applied statistics at The Open University.

If 10,000 of these people took aspirin for a year, 57 of them would have a heart attack or stroke. "Only four fewer in 10,000, but that still has some importance, given how common such diseases are and how serious cardiovascular disease is," said Prof McConway, who was not involved in the study.

Heart disease is the top killer of people worldwide, taking 17.9 million lives around the planet each year, amounting to one-third of all deaths, says the World Health Organisation.

"The downside is the increase in major bleeding events, including bleeding inside the skull and brain or major bleeds in the stomach or gut," added Prof McConway.

In a non-aspirin-taking pool of 10,000 people, 16 would have such an event in a year, compared with 23 among aspirin-takers.

In other words, about seven more major bleeds annually, which Prof McConway described as a "substantial increase", even though the annual risk of a haemorrhage "is still not high".

According to a recent nationwide survey of US adults, about half reported regular aspirin use.

Dr Sean Zheng, a cardiologist at King's College Hospital in London and lead author of the Jama report, said that the public may not understand that taking low-dose, or baby aspirin, carries significant risks.

"In my opinion, there is no place for routine use of aspirin in patients who are healthy," he said.

"Maybe it's because it's over the counter and it's described as a baby aspirin, but actually, our data shows that there is a very real risk and you shouldn't take it with the expectation that it's completely benign and safe."

Aspirin is not recommended in Britain for the prevention of heart disease.

But in the United States, the US Preventive Services Task Force recommends "initiating low-dose aspirin use for the primary prevention of cardiovascular disease (CVD) and colorectal cancer in adults aged 50 to 59 years who have a 10 per cent or greater 10-year CVD risk, are not at increased risk for bleeding and have a life expectancy of at least 10 years". AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



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askSTart On thin ice

The mercury is rising faster in the Arctic than anywhere else on Earth, and a new normal is emerging. The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) recently released 2018 Arctic Report Card reveals that last year, the Arctic region saw its second-warmest air temperature and the

second-lowest overall sea-ice coverage on record, and the lowest recorded winter ice cover in the Bering Sea. The Straits Times looks at some of the highlights from the Arctic report and other related research and why we should be concerned.

ARCTIC FACTBOX



Population

- About 4 million
- Spread across seven countries, with Russia accounting for about half
- 15 per cent of the population is indigenous

Who owns the Arctic

Canada, Denmark (via Greenland), Norway, Russia, US, Finland, Iceland and Sweden all have sovereign rights and are considered Arctic nations.

A trove of hidden reserves

The US government estimates that 20 per cent of the world's undiscovered oil and gas lies in the polar region.

ON A SUSTAINED DOWNWARD SPIRAL

About twice as fast

Rate of warming in the Arctic compared with the global average

Air temperatures from 2014 to 2018 have topped all previous records since 1900

The Arctic saw its second-warmest year on record between October 2017 and September 2018

7 times more prevalent

Harmful algal blooms that occur off the Alaskan coast compared with 40 years ago

Arctic Ocean

Highest concentration of microplastics* among the world's ocean basins

*Plastic particles less than 5mm across

By 2050

Projection of a virtually ice-free Arctic Ocean in summer

Arctic summer sea ice in the past 40 years

50% reduction

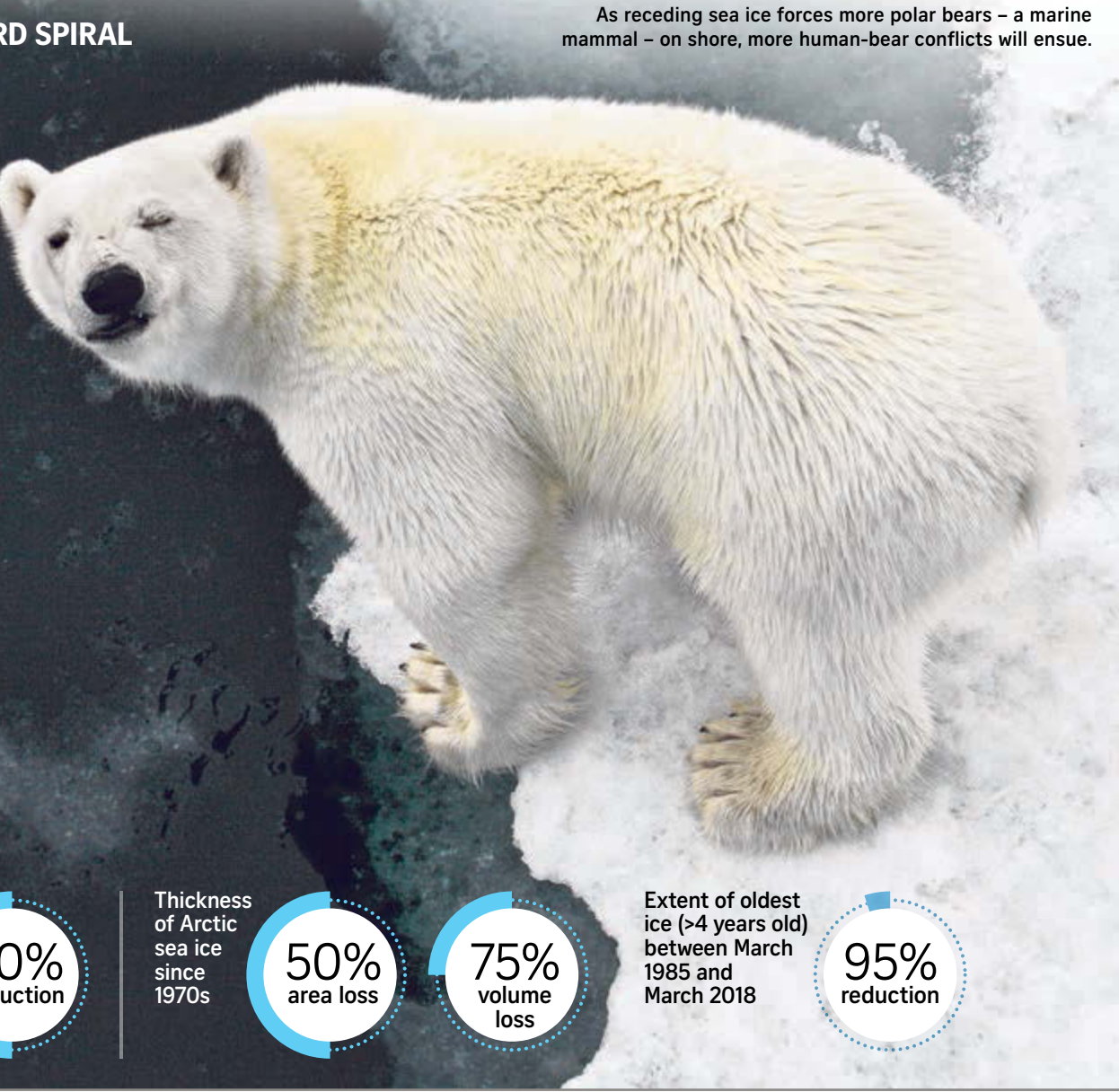
Thickness of Arctic sea ice since 1970s

50% area loss

75% volume loss

Extent of oldest ice (>4 years old) between March 1985 and March 2018

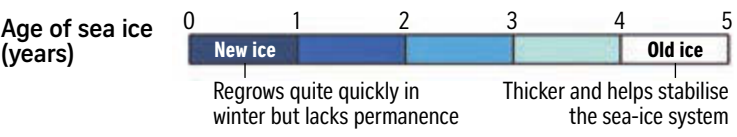
95% reduction



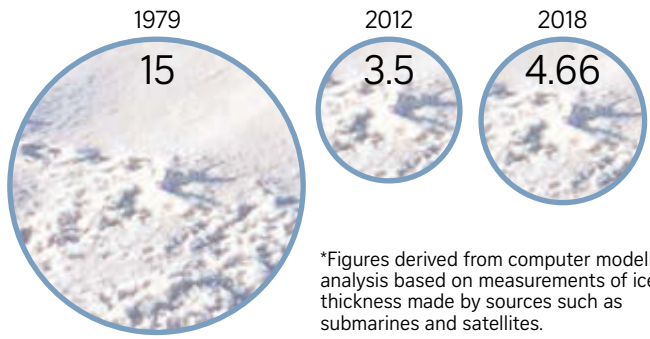
As receding sea ice forces more polar bears – a marine mammal – on shore, more human-bear conflicts will ensue.

A CHANGING ARCTIC

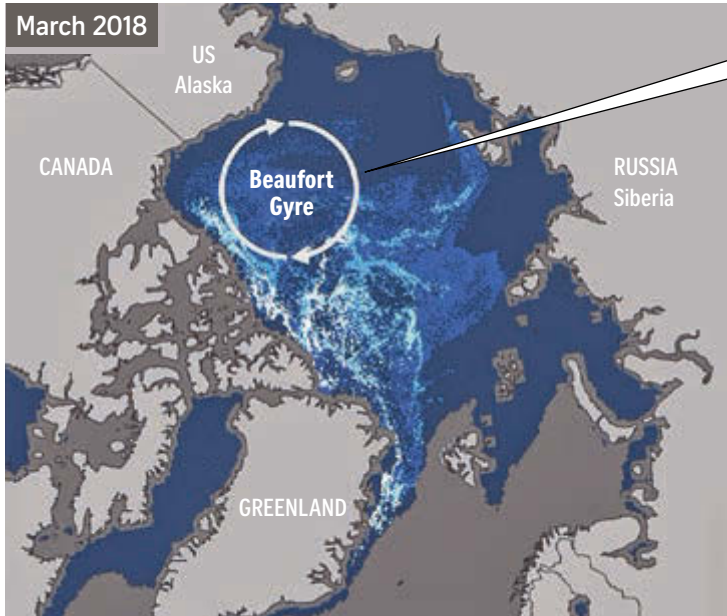
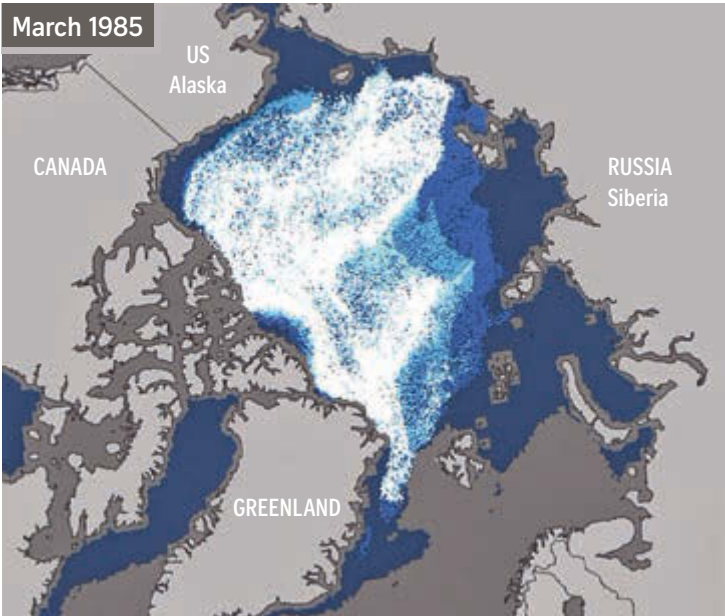
Old ice versus new ice



Average September sea-ice volume in Arctic Ocean (trillion tonnes)*



*Figures derived from computer modelling analysis based on measurements of ice thickness made by sources such as submarines and satellites.



- In the past, sea ice in this gyre could remain in the Arctic for many years, thickening over time.
- Since the late 1990s, longevity of ice in the Beaufort Gyre has changed due to warming along the Alaskan and Siberian coasts.

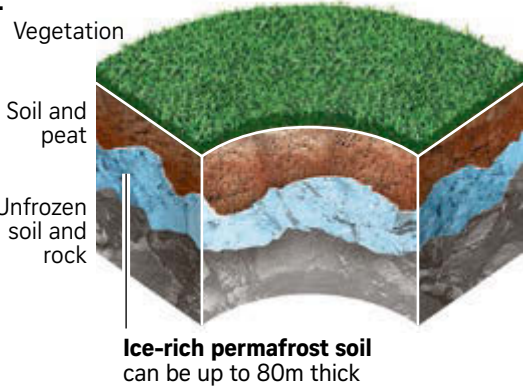
EFFECTS OF A RAPIDLY WARMING ARCTIC

What happens in the Arctic does not stay in the Arctic. A warming Arctic will bring on a host of issues, impacting not only the global environmental system, but also profound commercial and geopolitical implications.

1 Thawing permafrost

As air temperature rises...

- Permafrost – frozen soil or rock that stays below 0 deg C for at least two years – slowly thaws, prompting soil microbes in it to turn the once-locked carbon into carbon dioxide and methane.
- These potent greenhouse gases then enter the atmosphere, exacerbating climate warming.



2 Loss of plant diversity

- Type and size of plants growing in the region are affected and some may even go extinct.
- Plant community height could increase by 20 per cent to 60 per cent by the end of the century. Taller plants could speed up the thawing of the permafrost lying below.

3 Relocation looms

Devoid of sea-ice protection from big waves, towns and villages face the prospect of relocating from the eroding and submerged coast.



4 Effecting weather extremities

It may be affecting both ocean currents and influencing weather patterns in other parts of the world – such as increased severe snowstorms in the US and extreme cold winters in Siberia.

5 Loss of water sources

- Hundreds of small lakes and ponds – some centuries old – have evaporated or drained into the thawing permafrost in the past few decades.
- Vegetation that takes their place may release harmful methane.
- Migratory birds and threatened species such as the spectacled eider, an Arctic sea duck, will lose their habitat, while native animals will have fewer water sources.



6 Arctic wildlife

- A warmer Arctic will see wildlife such as coyotes, grizzly bears and orcas (below) venture northward.
- Some of these animals may bring with them novel pathogens. Native species such as polar bears, muskoxen, narwhal and beluga whales may be inflicted with rare diseases or face food competition.



7 Increased human activity and Arctic militarisation



A US aircraft carrier entered the Arctic Circle last October – a first in nearly 30 years.

- Easier access to the Arctic Ocean for oil and gas exploitation and tourism. All this could cause irreversible harm to pristine habitats and disturbance to wildlife.
- China launched its first domestically built icebreaker last September, with an expedition planned for the first half of this year.
- As military and commercial vessels converge on the Arctic Ocean, the risk of conflict between countries rises.



Populations of migratory caribou and wild reindeer – the Arctic's iconic wildlife species – plunged 56 per cent (from 4.7 million to 2.1 million) over the past two decades, according to the 2018 Arctic Report Card.

SOURCES AND PHOTOS: ARCTIC REPORT CARD 2018, NATIONAL SNOW AND ICE DATA CENTRE, NATURE.COM, SMITHSONIAN, SCIENCENORDIC.COM, ARCTIC BASECAMP, SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN, WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, NOAA, UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, ISTOCK
STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS: LIM YONG



While an influx of tourists could have a detrimental impact on the arctic environment, blocking all forms of tourism is not the solution as it means taking away livelihoods from a lot of people, say observers. Instead, tourism has to be organised, and done in a safe way, they add. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Melting sea ice sparks debate over arctic tourism

Keppel Corp proposes hub for smaller ships to minimise impact on North Pole’s ecology

Audrey Tan
Environment Correspondent
In Tromso (Norway)

Many tourists are drawn to the region around the North Pole for its glaciers and northern lights. And, with melting sea ice making the icy north more accessible to ships, tourism is only likely to increase.

This has raised concerns over how arctic cities and communities would cope with an influx of tourists, and the impact that they would have on the environment.

Singapore infrastructure company Keppel Corp has proposed a solution. “We are looking into the possibility of creating an arctic hub, a floating structure which will allow tourists to disembark and visit the Arctic while minimising their impact on the fragile environment,” said Mr Aziz Merchant, executive director of the marine and deepwater technology division of Keppel Offshore and Marine.

At a plenary on seaways at the Arctic Frontiers conference in Tromso, Norway, on Tuesday, he said the arctic hub could rely on a network of smaller passenger vessels to take tourists to land, but had the potential to become a destination in itself.

He told The Straits Times that there are concerns that cities may not have the right infrastructure to support arctic tourism if ships were to dock on land.

“The arctic hub was a concept we put forward to show how tourists

can enjoy the arctic environment and ambience without disturbing the fragile environment,” he said, adding that tourism revenue could also benefit arctic communities.

However, Mr Merchant said plans for the arctic hub are still at a conceptual stage and that arctic tourism is still a developing area.

In the shorter term, Keppel’s interests lie in building infrastructure to support the maritime industry in the Arctic, whether in the form of search-and-rescue facilities or in the construction of ice-class vessels, he said.

The opportunities and challenges brought about by a warming Arctic were discussed at length at the conference on Tuesday, with policymakers, academics and business representatives sharing their views on a range of issues, from fisheries to new sea routes.

There were discussions of the role of arctic fisheries and aquaculture in contributing to global food security, at a time when global warming is restricting the ranges for arctic species such as cod.

Aquaculture currently contributes between 30 per cent and 40 per cent to Norway’s overall seafood production, with fisheries making up the bulk. But Norway’s state secretary for fisheries Roy Angvik predicted this proportion will increase in the years ahead.

But it was the role of tourism in the Arctic that sparked the most heated debate, with panellists and members of the audience debating

whether having greater numbers of visitors would be more of a boon or bane to the pristine north.

Mr Daniel Skjeldam, chief executive of the Norwegian explorer cruise line Hurtigruten, said tourism, if done in a sustainable way, could create “climate ambassadors” – tourists who, after witnessing the impacts of climate change on their travels, make changes to their daily lives.

“If you block all forms of tourism to this area, you are taking away livelihoods from a lot of people, and you are not doing the teaching. But (the tourism) has to be organised, and done in a safe way,” he said.

Others were less convinced, with an audience member asking the panellists about the impact of noise pollution created by big ships on sea animals such as whales. She said: “We talk about people, we talk about money, but what about nature?”

Dr Michael Byers, who holds the Canada Research Chair in Global Politics and International Law at the University of British Columbia, said the Canadian government is looking to identify corridors for shipping that steer vessels away from Inuit communities, who are dependent on wildlife.

“The ships are kept away from environmentally sensitive areas because the noise from the ships can be very disturbing to marine mammals, some of which use echolocation to hunt,” he said. “This is part of what Canada is seeking to do to reduce the impact of shipping, by providing these corridors as recommendations for where responsible companies should go.”

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S’pore plans to keep port attractive

TROMSO (Norway) • Singapore plans to keep its port operations cheaper, faster and better so its maritime trade continues to thrive, even if global warming causes an alternative trade route to open up in the Arctic Ocean.

“We have to make sure that our port provides the most efficient, cost-effective services to shipping companies. So even with reduced shipping activities, there will still be a sizeable number of ships calling at our port,” said Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sam Tan.

Speaking to The Straits Times on the sidelines of a conference on arctic issues in Tromso, Norway, on Monday, he cited Singapore’s investment of billions of dollars in the new Tuas mega port as a strategy to safeguard the Republic’s maritime industry, which accounts for 7 per cent of gross domestic product.

The Tuas project will increase Singapore’s port capacity to 65 million TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent

units) of cargo, more than double what the port handled in 2016.

The project will consolidate all of Singapore’s port operations in Tuas and open from 2021.

Global warming is causing sea ice in the Arctic to melt, opening up the Northern Sea Route to ships.

This is a passageway that will shave 30 per cent off travel time via the conventional Suez Canal-Malacca Strait option. While it is now open for only a few months during the summer, accelerating rates of melting sea ice could make this route viable all year round.

Mr Tan said such developments may not pose immediate threats. But Singapore is taking a long-term view on arctic developments – whether it is the opening up of new trade routes or rising sea levels caused by melting glaciers, he added.

To prepare for the rise in sea levels, for instance, the authorities in 2011 raised the minimum reclamation level to at least 4m above mean

sea level – an increase of 1m.

Mr Tan said: “We have to prepare ourselves... if we don’t do anything, when the new water channels open up and sea levels rise, we will be caught flat-footed.”

But there are opportunities to be reaped as well. Singapore’s Keppel Corp, for example, has built rigs and ships for customers operating in the Arctic.

Mr Aziz Merchant, executive director of the marine and deepwater technology division of Keppel Offshore and Marine, said he saw opportunities in building search and rescue facilities, ice-class vessels and tourism infrastructure.

On the need for search and rescue facilities, Mr Merchant, who also attended the Arctic Frontiers conference, said: “With increased activity in the Arctic region, there is a rising need to enhance search and rescue operations there.”

Audrey Tan



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News analysis

No end in sight for longest federal government shutdown

Calling Republican-proposed Bill a poison pill, the Democrats have no impetus to give in



Nirmal Ghosh

US Bureau Chief
In Washington

The United States Senate is set to vote today in Washington on a Republican-proposed Bill to end the longest federal government shutdown – essentially a funding lapse that has left hundreds of thousands of federal employees working without pay – in the country's history.

But with the Democrats still against the proposal, the chances of it passing remain uncertain at best.

If the legislation does not pass, the Senate will then vote on a separate Bill proposed by the Democrats to reopen the federal government, but only for a short period, until Feb 8.

The partial shutdown is being used as leverage by both sides in a fight over funding for a wall – now being called a barrier – on the Mexico border. The Republican Bill

wants US\$5.7 billion (S\$7.75 billion) for the wall. The Democrat-proposed legislation does not include that.

But the issue is now beyond the wall. The partisan gridlock that has worsened since the Democrats won back control of the House in November is a signal of what will be increasingly vicious political battles in the run-up to the next presidential election in November 2020, which is less than two years away.

In a related stand-off, US President Donald Trump's State of the Union speech meant for next Tuesday, is in doubt, with the Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi having written to him saying the shutdown has affected security services so the President should defer his address, traditionally delivered before a joint sitting of the House and the Senate.

The specific battle over funding for the wall is entering a crucial phase. Tomorrow will be the second time many federal staff (there are some 800,000 directly affected by the shutdown) will not get their pay cheques.

Emergency legislation has been passed to ensure they get back pay when the shutdown ends, but meanwhile, thousands have had to resort to getting free food from



The Food Bank for New York City distributing food to federal workers affected by the partial government shutdown. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

pop-up food banks. Many thousands have been unable to pay mortgage and other bills. Many have taken to driving for firms like Lyft and Uber to make ends meet.

The FBI Agents Association on Tuesday said the shutdown had affected the bureau's operations at home and abroad, hampering its ability to counter street gangs, drug and human traffickers, and terrorism. Part of the reason – no money to pay informants.

The Transportation Security Administration, which checks air passengers, among other things, is also suffering a staff shortage. Unscheduled absences among its

workers reportedly rose to 10 per cent on Sunday. On Monday, it said: "Many employees are reporting that they are not able to report for work due to financial limitations."

The partial government shutdown started on Dec 22. S&P Global Ratings has estimated that if it continues to tomorrow, then it would have cost the economy US\$6 billion – ironically, that exceeds the US\$5.7 billion that Mr Trump wants for the wall.

Among the sweeteners in the new legislation, which will need 60 votes in the 100-seat Senate, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell worked in temporary extensions for

"Dreamers" and an extension of the Violence Against Women Act, which has expired and not been renewed because of the shutdown.

"Dreamers" are the children – now adults – of illegal immigrants who were allowed by former president Barack Obama to stay, work and study in the US under a programme President Trump wants to terminate, on grounds that it was unconstitutional. This leaves some 700,000 "Dreamers" vulnerable to deportation.

The issue, now pending in the Supreme Court, is a major sticking point for the Democrats, who want them to stay. The sweeteners might make it hard for them to resist the Bill, or conversely make them look bad if they do. In essence, Mr McConnell is trying to force the Democrats to vote against opening the government.

Polls show that most Americans blame Mr Trump for the shutdown. A Quinnipiac University poll conducted over the past week shows that 56 per cent blame the Republicans and 36 per cent blame the Democrats.

As long as that stays the same, while Mr Trump has staked his own credibility on delivering on the wall, the Democrats – who call the legislation a poison pill as it still contains US\$5.7 billion for the wall and a proposal to overhaul asylum laws – do not have an incentive to give in.

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Report says US' foes will capitalise on West's weakness

WASHINGTON • America's traditional adversaries will take advantage of the weakening of the postwar order and isolationist tendencies of the West to assert greater influence, a new strategy document from the director of national intelligence has warned.

Russian efforts to increase its influence are likely to continue, and China is continuing its pursuit of "economic and territorial predominance in the Pacific region", the report unveiled on Tuesday said.

The document, compiled every four years, is meant to guide the intelligence agencies' broad strategic goals. While it outlines the threat to the United States in broad terms, it includes little in the way of details about specific threats from China, Russia or other countries.

The leaders of US intelligence agencies are expected to testify to Congress early next month with a more fulsome assessment of the threats facing the country.

Mr Dan Coats, director of national intelligence, will most likely field questions at that hearing about China's intensifying espionage activities and Russia's continuing efforts to interfere in democratic institutions in the US and the rest of the West.

Adversaries are using not just traditional means of asserting strength in security matters, but also hybrid and asymmetric means to gain political, military and economic power, according to the report.

"Traditional adversaries will continue attempts to gain and assert influence, taking advantage of changing conditions in the international environment – including the weakening of the post-WWII international order and dominance of Western democratic ideals, increasingly isolationist tendencies in the West, and shifts in the global economy," the report said.

In setting priorities for the intelligence agencies, the 2019 document echoes much of the direction of the strategy released in September 2014. But the new document raises bigger concerns over counter-intelligence threats.

The US faces counter-intelligence challenges from both foreign spy services and insider threats – government employees and contractors who use their access to intelligence networks to "wittingly or unwittingly" hurt America's security – according to the document.

Technological advances have helped foreign intelligence agencies "to field increasingly sophisticated capabilities and aggressively target the government, private-sector partners, and academia".

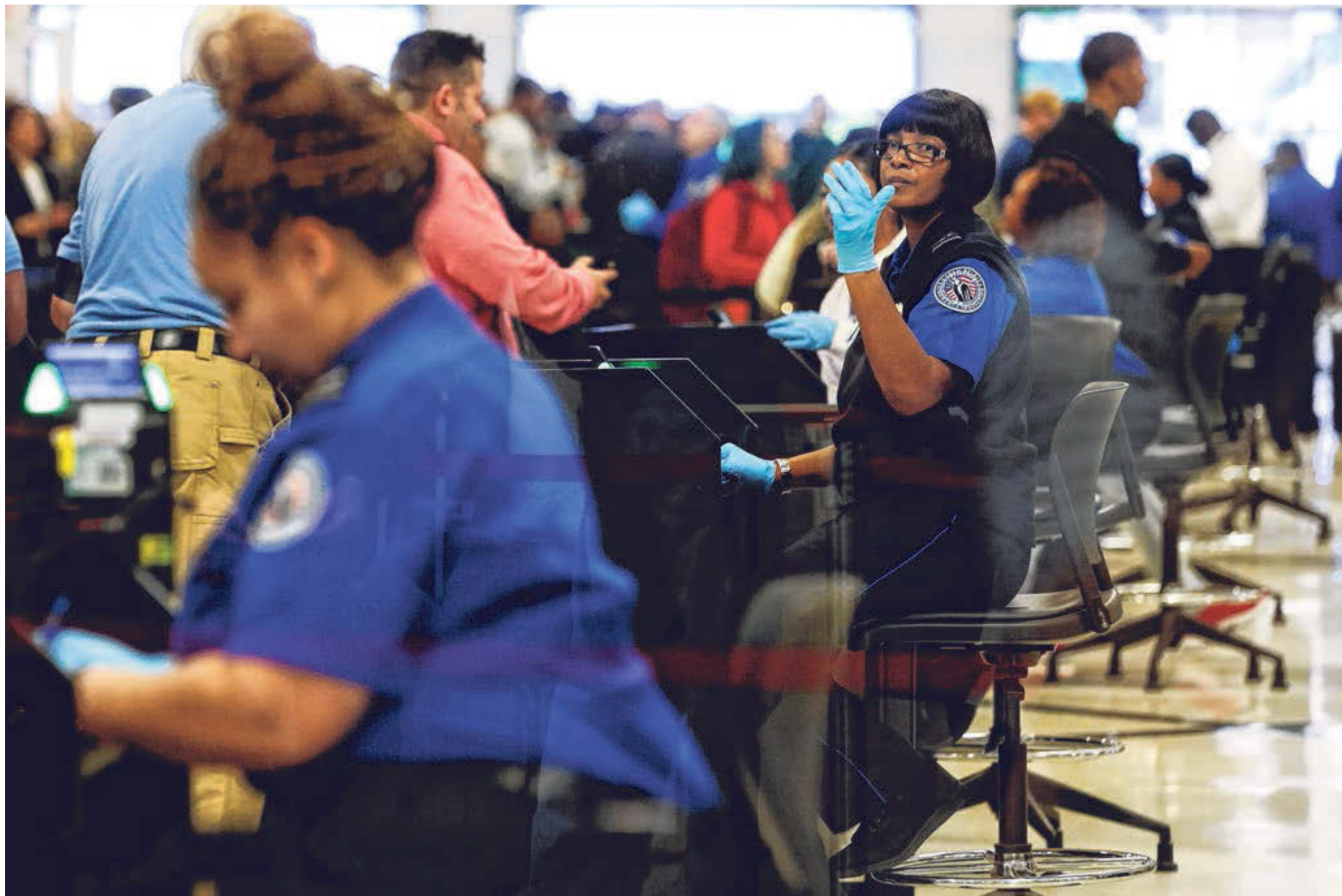
Those new technologies provide not only foreign intelligence agencies easier means to steal secrets, but can also threaten critical infrastructure and weaken American influence.

In a speech to intelligence officials on Tuesday, Mr Coats said the new strategy urges the agencies to better use advanced technology to improve the tools that analysts and operatives use.

New 5G technologies will speed information transmission well beyond today's Internet, Mr Coats said, which will change how the world, and intelligence agencies, operate. He predicted that artificial intelligence and machine learning will enable US spy agencies to process all of the data they collect "instead of being buried under it".

"It's a constant struggle to process data, analyse it and convert it into knowledge and understanding for our customers," Mr Coats said. "It's one of our greatest challenges."

Mr Coats also included in the strategy a new section on transparency, promising to share more information with the public. "We will be open about how we help protect the nation," he said. "And whenever possible, we will share with the public the insight we offer to policymakers." NYTIMES



As many as one in every 10 transportation security officers has been failing to show up for work, and backup officers have had to be flown in to bolster depleted ranks at some airports because of the partial US government shutdown. A rising number of them have stopped reporting for work because they have not been paid, and travellers are wondering if it is safe to fly. PHOTO: REUTERS

Safety risks as airport workers stop showing up

WASHINGTON • A US government shutdown continues to put extraordinary pressure on the nation's air-travel system, with as many as one in every 10 transportation security officers failing to show up for work, and reserve workers having to be flown in to bolster depleted ranks at some airports.

The rate of unscheduled absences of airport screening agents dropped to 7.5 per cent on Monday, down from 10 per cent the day before, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) said.

But the agency still had to deploy some backup officers to big airports, including Newark Liberty International in New Jersey, a spokesman for the agency said on Tuesday.

The agency's force of more than 50,000 officers learnt on Tuesday

that they, like the rest of the 800,000 federal workers who have not been paid during the month-long shutdown, would miss another pay cheque this week.

The agency said that many of the absentees had cited financial troubles as their reason for not coming to work, a signal that the call-out rate is likely to continue rising until the shutdown ends.

Transportation experts and elected officials have begun asking how much longer the air-travel system can continue running safely.

"Every day that goes by puts us a day or an hour closer to a potential bad thing happening," said Mr John Pistole, a former administrator of the TSA.

The entire system is operating under unusual pressures: Workers are being ordered to report for duty

with no idea when they will be paid for their labour.

Airlines are losing more than US\$100 million (S\$136 million) a month in revenue with the grounding of federal workers. Travellers are wondering how long it will take to get through airports and whether it is safe to fly.

On the front line stand the security screeners, who make less than US\$40,000 a year and have not been paid in more than three weeks.

A rising number of them have stopped showing up for work because of financial troubles, the security administration said.

In their absence, some airports have had to close checkpoints, as Baltimore-Washington International did over the weekend.

At others, such as Newark Liberty

International and Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International, the TSA has had to deploy additional screeners to cope with long lines.

Mr Pistole, who oversaw the TSA's force of more than 50,000 screening agents under President Barack Obama, said he worried that the stress of not being able to pay bills or feed their families could result in a dangerous lapse.

Representative Gregory Meeks, a Democrat from New York City, said some workers told him they were having trouble buying enough fuel to drive back and forth to Kennedy International Airport.

He said he doubted that they could continue to show up much longer without getting paid. In the meantime, he said: "You've got to consider the safety of the air-travel system in its entirety." NYTIMES

DANGER LURKING

Every day that goes by puts us a day or an hour closer to a potential bad thing happening.



MR JOHN PISTOLE, a former administrator of the TSA.

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No letting up in war on drugs

SENDING drug abusers who confess to consumption offences, and who do not face other criminal charges, to rehabilitation – regardless of how many times they are arrested – might appear to be going soft on drug consumption. After all, taking drugs is consumption, the tough punishment for which has been a cornerstone of Singapore’s war on drugs. Tough measures have also ranged from preventing their use, to say nothing of deterring their trafficking. Hence, previously, hardcore abusers – those caught for the third time or more – would be given sentences of at least five years in jail and three strokes of the cane under the Long-Term (LT) Imprisonment scheme that was introduced here in 1998. Now, following amendments

to the Misuse of Drugs Act, a distinction will be drawn between “pure” abusers who only consume drugs and those who face charges over other offences. However, the change does not dilute the direction of the anti-drug war although it redraws the route to the destination. The retributive purpose of any law short of the death penalty – be that a law against drugs or any other crime – must be balanced by its rehabilitative potential. Long detention periods affect abusers’ ability to reintegrate themselves into society, with the five-year recidivism rates for LT inmates remaining very high at 60 per cent. Sadly, such former abusers are also less able to hold down a job after a long period in

jail and often become estranged from their families and communities. It is much better to distinguish between pure abusers, who would benefit from the rehabilitative approach, and those who face charges over other offences, which must attract greater retribution. Also, changes to the Act, which have been passed in Parliament, make it an offence to show another person how to consume, procure or traffic drugs. Further, acts that expose children to drugs and those that permit young persons to consume drugs have been criminalised. These measures show that there is really no let-up in the effort against drugs. Instead, factors such as availability are being tackled with a new decisiveness

that was once reserved for punitive measures that targeted the sale and consumption of drugs. This widening of the net underlines the resolution that continues to inhine Singapore’s no-nonsense approach to the drug scourge. However, no legislation can work as well as self-legislation. Families of vulnerable individuals must form the first protecting ring against an addictive habit that leads to the ruin of otherwise worthy and productive individuals, imposes economic costs on families and society, and denudes a person of the self-respect that comes from being in self-control. Nicotine and alcohol are poor cousins of drugs: It is the latter with which Singapore has to contend with all its material and moral resources.

HomeFront

From ‘many helping hands’ to fewer and stronger hands?



Theresa Tan

Senior Social Affairs Correspondent

It is no exaggeration to say that Thye Hua Kwan (THK) is a charity that runs services catering to people from cradle to grave. It runs the Ang Mo Kio-Thye Hua Kwan Hospital, four centres with early intervention programmes for children with disabilities, five family service centres (FSCs) that provide counselling and other help to families, 21 senior activity centres, free funeral rites for the destitute – the list goes on. It has expanded from about 1,400 staff running 66 services and programmes in 2014 to slightly over 2,000 employees managing 90 programmes now. Its chairman of 40 years, Mr Lee Kim Siang, said: “The demand for services is higher and if we can take it (new service) on, we will take it on. So we have grown.” THK is not alone in its rapid expansion. Other charities that have grown significantly in the past five years include the AMKFSC Community Services and Fei Yue Community Services. For instance, AMKFSC Community Services, which began as an FSC in Ang Mo Kio in 1978, has doubled its staff strength to 250 and grown the number of centres from 10 to 25 in its past five financial years. The growth of these medium-sized and large charities reflects two trends in the social service sector: the relentless push towards professionalism and consolidation measures.

WELL-TRAINED PROFESSIONALS The social service sector is staffed by well-trained professionals – not volunteers as some may mistakenly assume – who go for continuous training to better their craft. To attract and retain talent, the National Council of Social Service has come up with competitive pay guidelines for charities to follow. Funding agencies are also more concerned these days about measuring the impact of the service rendered and checking that key performance indicators are met, said charity chiefs interviewed. What this means is that bigger or well-run charities – with their resources and opportunities for career progression – are better able to attract staff and even funds. With strong leadership and good track



records, it is only natural that some of these charities are growing from strength to strength. **CONSOLIDATION CALLING** Another factor fuelling the growth of the bigger boys is likely to be the consolidation going on in the sector. Last year, the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) consolidated the number of charities running programmes for young offenders and at-risk youth from over 20 agencies to just nine. The nine, called Integrated Service Providers (ISPs), run a suite of programmes for youth living in their region. The ISPs include AMKFSC Community Services, Fei Yue Community Services and the Singapore Children’s Society. For example, AMKFSC Community Service is the ISP for Ang Mo Kio and Yishun (one region) and Punggol, Pasir Ris and Tampines (another region), and it handles all the youth living in these estates who are placed on any of the programmes under the ISP framework. An MSF spokesman said the aims

of the ISP are to ensure “quality control” of the programmes, streamline processes for consistency in service delivery and focus resources to build capabilities in the sector. As the ISP is located in their neighbourhood, it is also more convenient for those on the programme to see their youth workers. The MSF initiated this ISP approach with eldercare services about five years ago. It appointed Senior Cluster Network operators where the operator runs the senior activity centres and senior group homes, among other services, in that estate. This is for greater synergy and to maximise resources, the MSF said then. Last April, the Ministry of Health (MOH) took over the oversight of the Senior Cluster Networks, which included 75 senior activity centres, two befriending services and one seniors helpline, from the MSF. An MOH spokesman said the transfer of eldercare services has allowed the MOH to review service planning for the eldercare sector more holistically.

PROS AND CONS

To be sure, the benefits of consolidation are apparent. Those interviewed cite better coordination, less duplication of services, and families being able to get help in a more holistic manner. For example, when a youth is referred to an ISP programme at Fei Yue Community Services, its staff can rope in colleagues from its other centres or relevant services to better help his family tackle problems as a whole, instead of each member seeking aid at different agencies. Its executive director Leng Chin Fai said: “As the sector evolves and matures, with a more educated and savvy population, many may look at a one-stop service provider for convenience.” The Government has always banded the “many helping hands” approach in helping the poor and vulnerable, with the Government, charities and the community coming together to extend a helping hand. Dr Vincent Ng, chief executive officer of AMKFSC Community

Services, said: “The bad part is that you could have too many helping hands until you don’t know which hand is doing what. Consolidation means you have a few strong hands doing the heavy lifting.” But there are also drawbacks to the move towards consolidation. The requirement to run a suite of programmes under the ISP model deters small charities as they are not likely to have the capacity to run multiple programmes. And some charities, which used to run one or two programmes that are now under the ISP model, find themselves struggling for survival now that they no longer do so. One small charity had to let four to five staff go – about half of its staff strength – after it stopped running one such programme when the ISP model was implemented. It had offered various options to affected staff, such as transfers to other programmes, but they decided to leave for greener pastures. Responding to this point, an MSF spokesman said there is help for smaller charities. The Community Chest Charity Support Fund, for instance, provides funding to smaller charities to support their programmes and capability-building efforts. Charity chiefs say there is another problem: If a programme is not funded by the Government, some charities may be reluctant to run it, given the hassle and difficulties of fund raising. This might lead to niche community needs being underserved. Mr Samuel Ng, chief executive of Montfort Care, said: “There’s this danger of falling into this ‘being a vendor of the Government’ mindset. A mindset where people don’t really think, they just follow.” It is no surprise that government grants are the biggest source of income for some big charities here, given that some have headcounts in the hundreds and operating expenses of over \$10 million a year. Take THK Moral Charities – one of four entities under the THK umbrella and the arm that runs most of its social services. In its financial year ended last March, it had an income of \$63.2 million and over 70 per cent of its revenue was from government grants. Despite the move towards consolidation and expansion, experts say there will continue to be a role for smaller charities. Those interviewed said small players have to find their niche and excel in it to survive. Some examples of smaller outfits that have done well, Dr Ng said, include the Samaritans of Singapore, which does suicide prevention work and Pave, which tackles family violence. Dr Ng explained that small agencies, with less bureaucracy than the big charities, are likely to be faster in responding to the community’s needs. And if they specialise in providing a particular service or tackling a particular need, they can develop deep expertise in that area – unlike larger charities that often branch out into different areas, he said. Charities have also to constantly innovate and cater to emerging needs to be relevant. As THK chairman Lee said: “These days, it is no longer enough just to have the heart for doing good, you need to have the brains and to balance your books, too.”

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When markets fail to discipline Big Tech, it's time for users to step up

Users should compare and rate terms of service agreements by tech giants and force them to treat customers respectfully

Carlos Fernandes

For The Straits Times

Progressive governments have generally taken a laissez-faire approach towards the regulation of technology companies.

That seems to be changing. But regulating the technology sector today will be more difficult than regulating any industry in history because of the exponential rate of change, the complexities arising with artificial intelligence and the strong likelihood of unintended consequences that would lead to the stymieing of innovation.

Tech giants have been in the news for some scandalous practices in recent months. Their practices run counter to theories of the firm that say companies' short-term profit-driven motives are aligned with their long-term interests of keeping customers.

Why would Apple surreptitiously slow down its devices unbeknownst to its users, when there is every expectation it would be found out eventually? Why would Facebook not simply disclose the Cambridge Analytica data breach, but instead stay silent and come clean only when the story publicly broke?

Are tech companies inherently less trustworthy?

I don't think so. But they, more than other firms, enjoy the benefits of network effects. Once locked into an Apple or Facebook ecosystem, using products associated with these tech giants becomes a matter of habit for billions of customers, who get used to engaging with friends and their social networks using these means. Once network effects take hold, positive externalities make it extraordinarily difficult for consumers to switch providers, thereby earning them loyalty, albeit grudgingly. This makes it easy for tech giants to take their users for granted, and thus delay admitting wrongdoing.

Also, barriers to entry for new



Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg testifying before lawmakers in Washington last April, over his company's data breach scandal. It recently emerged that he had mulled over selling user data in 2012 and 2014, notwithstanding his promise in 2009 never to do so, says the writer. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

entrants are reinforced. Analysis by a venture firm, NFX, states that network effects account for 70 per cent of the value creation in tech. As such, companies that grow their platforms, despite impropriety (or by withholding alarming news that might scare consumers for as long as possible) are rewarded by sheer market forces in the long run, as opposed to being penalised by the marketplace.

The short-term, grow-at-all-costs mindset not being incongruent with long-term success creates perverse incentives that drive the "it's better to seek forgiveness rather than permission" mantra that virtually all technology companies subscribe to today.

CUSTOMER POWER

If tech giants do not face the discipline of the market when they err, should customers be the ones who force discipline on them? Should these tech giants be forced to have service agreements with customers that bind them to certain ethical behaviours?

It recently emerged that Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg mulled over selling user data in 2012 and 2014, notwithstanding he had previously, in 2009, categorically promised never to do so. Why? Because he believed that if he wanted to sell it, he could.

Shouldn't Facebook's terms of service be aligned with Mr Zuckerberg's previous promises? Apparently, you can publicise promises and commitments, but they aren't as legally binding as terms of service that are virtually never read. Ironically, Apple CEO Tim Cook lamented in a January letter to shareholders that the company's selling of discounted batteries as mea culpa for its throttling scandal has hurt sales of new iPhones. If discounted batteries have been driving down iPhone sales now, what about willfully throttled iPhones driving up iPhone sales during Apple's previous blockbuster quarters? Technology companies can act with impunity because of the carte

The short-term, grow-at-all-costs mindset not being incongruent with long-term success creates perverse incentives that drive the "it's better to seek forgiveness rather than permission" mantra that virtually all technology companies subscribe to today.

blanche rights that are afforded to them by their terms of service.

TERMS OF SERVICE AGREEMENTS

Companies should no longer be given free rein with their terms of service.

But regulating the terms of service of technology companies with a rules-based approach is doomed to fail. Prescriptive approaches will be cleverly bypassed, will not deliver desired outcomes and the regulations could indeed hinder a country's competitiveness. While there are two sides to the regulation debate, the need for transparency in free markets is hard for anyone to challenge – regardless of which side of the debate you sit on.

One designer, Mr Dima Yarovsky, calculated the average length of the terms of service of the most popular Internet services to be 11,972 words. If the average person reads 200 words a minute, the terms of service would take a user approximately 60 minutes to read before agreeing to them. It

should come as no surprise that a 2017 Deloitte study found that 97 per cent of people within the 18-34 age group agreed to conditions without reading them. Across all age groups, the number stood at 91 per cent. Users click the "I agree to the terms of service" button and everyone – the companies included – knows that it is a lie. It's a convenient lie because the company has protected itself, without incurring the user experience friction that would occur had the user actually attempted to read the agreement.

There should be no free lunch. It is time that onerous or overly broad terms of service incur some sort of economic cost.

RATE TERMS OF SERVICE

That hasn't happened because terms of service are hiding in plain sight. This is where market-based regulation needs to come in. A rating agency that rates and reviews the terms of service of companies could achieve this. Companies could be required to list the ratings and reviews they obtain alongside the "I agree" button.

Health officials constantly rate the cleanliness of food establishments and mandate the ratings' prominent display; Apple and Google encourage users to rate the apps from developers. Why can't the same be done with terms of service?

We have already seen that by crowdsourcing employment agreements, tech industry workers in California are strengthening their position and shining the spotlight on binding arbitration clauses in employment agreements that unfairly – but legally – restrict them from achieving judicial remedies for sexual harassment claims. It is clear that rating terms of service would similarly create a situation where companies are forced to trade between unfettered rights over their users and the reputational cost arising from such a demand and the ensuing negative publicity.

This tension in of itself could help go a long way towards achieving the optimal outcome of ensuring the technology industry acts justly and respectfully towards its users, but at the same time, not compromising or constraining some of the advancements in society that it has helped drive.

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• Carlos Fernandes is a technology investor, entrepreneur and former member of the Pro-Enterprise Panel, a private-public panel chaired by the head of Civil Service.

Davos tiptoes around issues of Big Tech governance

Rana Foroohar

DAVOS • There is always a fundamental tension at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos about what business does and what it says. Nowhere is this tension greater than in the conversation around Big Tech, and the challenges that surveillance capitalism poses to competition, privacy and civil liberty, even as it is increasingly enriching companies in not just the tech sector, but also in every industry.

During the first full day of WEF programming, there were plenty of official sessions about things such as how to govern data and run digital economies fairly, though they were marked with a techno-optimism that was decidedly out of touch with the general population's concern about the disruptive effects of the digital economy regarding their jobs and politics.

According to the Edelman Trust Barometer released at the first day of the conference, for example, 73 per cent of the population polled worry about fake news being used as a weapon.

The industry itself was in full public relations mode, trying to combat the growing "techlash".

One of the most popular sessions of the day, the Strategic Outlook for the Digital Economy, was moderated by Ms Victoria Espinel, president and chief executive of the Business Software Alliance, a large industry lobbying group.

The result was a conversation, like many in Davos, that tiptoed around the most pressing issues.

Mr Ken Hu, a deputy chairman from Huawei, was on the panel, as was Mr Alfred Kella, the chief executive of Visa. Yet there was no discussion of the international tech security battles that led to the recent arrest in Canada of Huawei chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou, or the fact that the United States is now seeking her extradition.

Neither was there any discussion of China's battle with Visa or other foreign companies.

But, behind the scenes, and amid US-China trade negotiations, many delegates were talking about the growing conflict between Western companies and governments that want to come up with clearer rules for how to ensure the free flow of

BALANCING ACT

The effort at every company is to understand whether there might be a way to assemble data without offending the public and violating their privacy. Blockchain is often mentioned in these conversations, of course. But the infrastructures we need are probably still several years away, at least.



MR DAVID KIRKPATRICK, founder of Technomy Media and author of The Facebook Effect, who hosted a dinner on 5G attended by a number of tech leaders.

digital information across borders, and countries like China where the government has more control.

As one US participant in those talks put it, "four years ago, when it became clear that the Chinese state was going to exert more control over the economy, a lot of people gave them a pass. Now, there's a feeling of, 'why should Alipay or China UnionPay get the whole market?'"

Indeed, there was talk that the legitimacy of the World Trade Organisation itself will hinge on whether the divisions between the US, Europe and China can be hashed out.

Meanwhile, companies from all countries and geographies were struggling to balance the need to retain public trust with the desire to tap the profits of big data.

In a number of private sessions, multinationals in the motor vehicle, health, agriculture and financial industries were talking up their plans to use big data to increase productivity and profit margins in a variety of ways – from personalised medical devices that relay health information to doctors in real time, to sensors that track soil moisture.

"In some senses, every company wishes it had Facebook's problems – not only its outside margins but also its control over personal data – which, after all, is the secret of its outside margins," said Mr David Kirkpatrick, founder of Technomy Media and author of The Facebook Effect, who hosted a dinner on 5G attended by a number of tech leaders.

"The effort at every company is to

understand whether there might be a way to assemble data without offending the public and violating their privacy. Blockchain is often mentioned in these conversations, of course. But the infrastructures we need are probably still several years away, at least."

Seamless standards of global governance around data also seem like a distant dream.

While the US conversation is still dominated by business pushing for light-touch regulation, the Chinese are lauding a model of centralised control of big data as the way to move ahead in areas such as artificial intelligence and 5G.

Both models worry Europeans, who want to put privacy and citizens, rather than consumers, as first priority.

At a WEF session on governing data, a participant from Turkey asked the panel whether the government could be trusted to set the right standards. Ms Marietje Schaake, a Member of the European Parliament, summed up the existential challenge well with her response.

"Those who've lived under dictatorships say, 'please don't give me a ministry of trust', and I agree with that fully. But is it acceptable that Mark Zuckerberg is the minister of trust?"

"Facebook and private companies determine so much about what is acceptable and not acceptable (regarding what can be and is done with citizens' data)."

She added: "Private norms are becoming more commonplace and aren't criticised."

FINANCIAL TIMES



Pro-independence protesters outside the Taipei-Shanghai Twin-City Forum in Taipei last month. Over the past decade, with mainland Chinese tourists travelling in droves to Taiwan and more Taiwanese moving to China to work and study, Taiwanese views on China and on reunification and independence are changing, says the writer. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

China’s courtship of Taiwan

The ‘one country, two systems’ model continues to be rebuffed, but Beijing’s long game of winning over young Taiwanese with jobs and a better future shows signs of success.



Goh Sui Noi

East Asia Editor

When Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed reunification between the mainland and Taiwan under the “one country, two systems” formula at the beginning of the year, he was rejected not just by the island’s independence-leaning government but also by the China-friendly opposition party Kuomintang (KMT).

As the KMT noted in its response: “At this stage, it would be difficult for ‘one country, two systems’ to be supported by the majority of Taiwan’s public.”

A survey conducted soon after Mr Xi’s proposal on Jan 2 bore this out: 80.9 per cent of respondents said “no”. Among KMT supporters, 64.7 per cent rejected the formula that would allow Taiwan to retain its political and economic systems after reunification.

For now, there is clearly no market for “one country, two systems” in Taiwan. Yet, if recent social and economic trends are any indication, the Taiwanese may yet come to accept a form of political integration that gives firm guarantees of preserving the democratic freedoms that they now enjoy.

HISTORY OF ‘ONE COUNTRY, TWO SYSTEMS’

Such a development would be a major turning point in the history of cross-strait ties – Taiwan has been consistent in rejecting the “one country, two systems” formula since it was first mooted 40 years ago by Beijing, an event that Mr Xi’s Jan 2 speech commemorated.

That first “message to compatriots in Taiwan” came on Jan 1, 1979, just after the United States switched recognition from the KMT-ruled Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan to the communist-run People’s Republic of China (PRC) in Beijing.

It was a watershed event in the contest for recognition between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the KMT, which had retreated to Taiwan in 1949 after losing the civil war on the mainland.

In that first message, Beijing signalled a change in its policy towards Taiwan from that of “armed liberation” to “peaceful reunification”. It noted that the world in general recognised just one China and the government of the PRC as the sole legal government, and that the trend towards reunification was unstoppable. Significantly, Beijing

said it would “take present realities into account” and “respect the status quo on Taiwan and the opinions of people in all walks of life there and adopt reasonable policies and measures in settling the question of reunification”.

This, wrote Brookings Institution senior fellow Richard Bush in his book Untying The Knot: Making Peace In The Taiwan Strait, sowed the seeds of the “one country, two systems” formula.

The concept took shape later that month when then paramount leader Deng Xiaoping stated that “we will respect the realities and current systems there so long as Taiwan returns to the motherland”.

In September 1981, Mr Ye Janying, then head of the Chinese legislature, the National People’s Congress, outlined what awaited Taiwan after reunification: It would “enjoy a high degree of autonomy as a special administration region” and could retain its armed forces; the central government would also not interfere with local affairs on the island.

The term “one country, two systems” was first used by Mr Deng in January 1982 as he added a further refinement of the concept: that of the continuation of the different economic systems – socialism on the mainland and capitalism on Taiwan.

However, Beijing’s overtures got nowhere over the years as different objections were raised. In 1979, President Chiang Ching-kuo declared there would be no contact, no negotiations and no compromise with the Chinese communists. In 1988, his successor Lee Teng-hui thought the “one country, two systems” formula would have subordinated the ROC government to the status of a local government. That Beijing did not clearly renounce the use of force was another sticking point.

TAIWAN SELF-IDENTITY

As Taiwan transitioned from the authoritarian rule of the KMT to a democracy, resistance to reunification under the PRC took a different form: growing democratisation came to be associated with Taiwan’s self-identity. This had two significant effects: More Taiwanese came to identify themselves as Taiwanese rather than Chinese. It also gave the Taiwan public a seat at the table whenever the Beijing and Taipei governments tried to resolve their differences through negotiations.

The upshot is reunification decisions can no longer be an elite exercise involving just the traditional rivals, KMT and the CCP. As Tamkang University’s Associate Professor Chang Wu-ueh told United Daily News earlier this month, without a public mandate, either through democratic elections or a referendum, it would be almost impossible for any Taiwanese government to promote or realise Mr Xi’s initiative on reunification.

To complicate matters, Hong Kong as the test bed for the “one country, two systems” formula has reinforced Taiwanese fears about the model.

FAILURE IN HONG KONG

On the 20th anniversary of Hong

Kong’s handover in 2017, polls in Taiwan showed 52 per cent of respondents deemed the formula a failure while 73 per cent said they were not willing to accept it as a formula for reunification. Among other things, the kidnapping of a Hong Kong bookseller from the city and detention in the mainland, and the growing Chinese influence on the territory’s politics and administration, have undermined faith among the Taiwanese that Beijing would keep its promises allowing the island the autonomy to maintain its separate systems post-reunification.

“Everyone wants to be his own master, this is the most basic thing about democracy,” said Chien Hsin University of Science and Technology’s Professor Yan Jiann-fa, who is also vice-president of the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy.

It is therefore unsurprising that President Tsai Ing-wen rejected Mr Xi’s offer, with her Cabinet-level Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) pointing out that the “one country, two systems” formula had brought demise to the Hong Kong people’s freedoms, rule of law and human rights.

Furthermore, unlike previous KMT governments, Ms Tsai’s pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is less enamoured of the reunification goal and rejects the so-called 1992 Consensus, a tacit understanding that there is only one China with each side free to interpret what this means.

However, despite the pro-independence DPP having been voted into power twice in recent years, the vast majority of Taiwanese have long opted for the current ambiguous political status. Polls by the MAC showed 82.9 per cent supported the status quo in 2008 with little change through the years.

The big question now is: How long will this state of affairs remain?

With Mr Xi pressing once again for reunification and the rise of a Taiwanese identity, which way will Taiwan voters tilt in the coming years?

SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS OF CHINA

It is instructive in this instance to look at longer-term trends.

Over the past decade, with mainland Chinese tourists travelling in droves to Taiwan and mainland students studying at Taiwan universities, and more Taiwanese moving to China to work and study, Taiwanese views on China and on reunification and independence are changing.

In August 2008, after eight years of DPP rule, a survey commissioned by the MAC showed 25.8 per cent of respondents supporting independence immediately or some time in the future, and just 10.1 per cent supporting unification (the term used in the English translation of the survey).

Last October, a similar survey showed a drop in those supporting independence to 22.6 per cent, and a significant rise in those supporting unification by nine points to 19.1 per cent.

The support for “one country, two systems” was 8.1 per cent in an August 2008 survey by the MAC. Since then it has risen. A poll this month by the Taiwan-based

Cross-Strait Policy Association had it at 13.7 per cent. A July 2017 survey by Taiwan Thinktank, a pro-independence outfit, had it higher still at 19 per cent.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND JOBS

Two main drivers are responsible for this rising support: money and youth. Despite the chill in political ties with the DPP leadership, Mr Xi has continued to push for the institutionalisation of cross-strait economic cooperation and to build a cross-strait common market.

He is also clearly targeting young Taiwanese, welcoming them to “come to the motherland to chase, build and realise their dreams”.

Beijing has also put money where its mouth is, implementing measures to attract Taiwanese to the mainland to live, work and study. Last year, an identity card for Taiwanese living in China that would give them greater access to public services was introduced. Beijing also announced an incentive package of 13 measures that included treating Taiwanese investors the same as their mainland counterparts and loosening regulations for the Taiwanese working in China.

A poll last March by the Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation, headed by a DPP stalwart, showed 30 per cent of Taiwanese welcomed the incentives. Notably, young people were more enthusiastic with 40 per cent of those aged 20 to 24 giving it the thumbs up.

These incentives have come as official statistics in Taiwan showed that, as of 2015, some 720,000 of its 10 million-strong workforce had moved overseas for better job opportunities, 60 per cent of them to China.

These findings have led to worries over not just a brain drain as wages in Taiwan stagnated, but also the island losing ground to China in the political tussle as well.

“If young generations can’t see hope in Taiwan and feel pessimistic about the future, and if poverty becomes a fact, how can they feel the obligation to insist on democracy and defend ideals?” a 2017 commentary of the pro-independence Liberty Times noted.

PRAGMATISM AND POLITICS

Said Dr Lin Chong-pin, a former deputy defence minister and vice-chairman of MAC: “More and more young people have been going to mainland China to work and earn a living, and some of the young people, having witnessed at least on the surface the progress made by China, have been thinking differently from before they went.”

He added that some of them do not mind the political system on the mainland. “They want to earn a good living, they want to live a better life, and more and more people are turning a blind eye to the political question.”

If these trends continue, Beijing may find that there is a market for its offer after all.

This is provided it is patient enough to play the long game and if it continues to succeed in the economic and social integration of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.

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Everyone is still getting the Covington story wrong

Molly Roberts

One’s opinion on the Covington Catholic fracas depends on the angle one chooses to see it from. Literally.

A clash captured on video among a group of white schoolboys wearing “Make America Great Again” (MAGA) caps, a Native American activist and a handful of Hebrew Israelites gave Americans plenty to do over the long weekend.

Commentators at first condemned the students for surrounding, staring down and mocking an older man of colour. Then, only a day later, those same commentators began apologising to the teenagers – and apologising for them, too. This shift occurred along a queasy sort of redemptive arc: People judged, and then they were judged in turn.

The students’ denouncers, eager to cast these children as the embodiment of Trumpism in all its entitled deplorability, were truth-tellers last Saturday. By Monday, according to the revised consensus, they were emblems of the entire rush-to-judgment, politically correct punditocracy.

In the new reality, which many observers have chosen to define as footage shot from an alternate vantage linked to an article in the libertarian-leaning Reason, the teens themselves had been harassed by those Hebrew Israelites screaming homophobic profanity. (Hebrew Israelites are members of a religious movement who preach that African-Americans are the true descendants of the Israelites in the Bible.)

Mr Nathan Phillips, the Native American man, then inserted himself into the confrontation. The boys may have been rambunctious, but by and large they had just stood by. Even the smirk on one student’s face that once inspired such ire was recast as a nervous attempt to defuse the situation.

Sombre mea culpas from the mainstream poured forth, promptly followed by self-satisfied self-congratulation. They may have erred at first, the commentators now told us, but they had adjusted their views, even when it did not suit their political inclinations, to accommodate nuance. Or not.

The latest wisdom on the episode only swaps one neatly spun narrative for another.

The original story was about how the racist, ignorant superiority that undergirds the Trumpist ideology could move privileged white teenagers to chant “Build the wall” at someone whose ancestors were here long before theirs. The story now is about how the hyper-polarisation of today’s society can move right-thinking Americans to condemn those who do not deserve it.

The first version was concocted by progressives of influence, perhaps with the help of some inauthentic Internet actors, and amplified by news outlets that aired that initial damning video.

The second comes from a fancy public relations firm with Republican links that was hired to defend the Covington crew. This version, too, has been catapulted to prominence by some of those same outlets, eager to correct what the country suddenly sees as a massive mistake.

The problem is, neither of these distillations captures the truth, which is hidden somewhere in a mess of different segments of different recordings showing different offences by different parties.

It is true that the Hebrew Israelites shouted invective at the kids, and it is true that the kids chanted school cheers to drown them out. It is also true that the schoolboys, whether someone else was mean to them beforehand or not, were giggling as they let loose with offensive war whoops and tomahawk chops while a Native American man beat his drum before them.

It is true that one of them ripped his shirt off in a signal of self-assured dominance. And it is true that a smirk is a smirk. Most important, it is true that context demands more than watching a single event from all possible angles. It also means understanding the world where the event happened.

Anyone who wears a MAGA hat knows what it stands for, and who it stands against. Anyone with an understanding of American history knows that white people have long made excuses for other white people’s racist behaviour – protecting their own as a method of protecting themselves.

There is a sense that outright condemnation often misses some essential reality. But sometimes, instead, condemning what is genuinely condemnable is the most real thing one can do.

The quarrel over the Covington teens is not only a story of social media hate-mobbing. It is also a story of the groupthinking tendency to hop off a bandwagon as unthinkingly as we hop onto it.

More important, it is a story of our desire to make every cultural controversy fit into a framework that tells some distillable truth about the state of the country today.

Any actual truth about the rifts running through America right now cannot be cleanly distilled. That’s a harder story to tell – which might be why so few are trying. WASHINGTON POST

The quarrel over the Covington teens is not only a story of social media hate-mobbing. It is also a story of the groupthinking tendency to hop off a bandwagon as unthinkingly as we hop onto it. More important, it is a story of our desire to make every cultural controversy fit into a framework that tells some distillable truth about the state of the country today.

Trump, Macron and the poverty of liberalism

Kishore Mahbubani

DAVOS • No Western liberal would disagree that Mr Donald Trump's election was a disaster for American society, while that of Mr Emmanuel Macron was a triumph for French society. In fact, the opposite may well be true, as heretical as that sounds.

The first question to ask is why people are engaged in violent street protests in Paris, but not in Washington, DC.

I have personally experienced these Paris protests, and the smell of tear gas on the Champs-Elysees reminded me of the ethnic riots I experienced in Singapore in 1964.

And why are the yellow vests protesting? For many, at least initially, it was because they did not believe that Mr Macron cared for or understood their plight.

The French President is trying to implement sensible macroeconomic reform. The proposed increases in taxes on diesel fuel would have reduced France's budget deficits and helped lower its carbon dioxide emissions. His hope was that a stronger fiscal position would increase confidence and investment in the French economy so that the bottom 50 per cent of society would eventually benefit.

But for people to endure short-term pain for long-term gain, they must trust their leader. And Mr Macron, it appears, has lost the trust of much of that bottom 50 per cent.

By contrast, Mr Trump retains the trust and confidence of the bottom half of American society, or at least the white portion of it.

At first sight, this seems strange and paradoxical: Billionaire Trump is socially much further from the bottom 50 per cent than the middle-class Mr Macron is.

But when the American President attacks the liberal and conservative US establishments, he is seen as venting the anger of the less well-off towards an elite that has ignored their plight. His election may, therefore, have had a cathartic effect on the bottom 50 per cent, which may explain the lack of street protests in Washington or other major US cities.

And these Americans have much

to be angry about. Most tellingly, the US is the only major developed society where the average income of the bottom half has not just stagnated, but also declined markedly, as Professor Danny Quah of the National University of Singapore has documented. Even more shockingly, the average income of the top 1 per cent was 138 times that of the bottom 50 per cent in 2010, up from 41 times higher in 1980.

There is no single explanation for why inequality in the US has rocketed, while the economic interests of the bottom 50 per cent have been ignored.

But we can obtain at least a partial answer by looking at the two principles of justice that Harvard philosopher John Rawls articulated in his 1971 book, *A Theory Of Justice*. The first principle emphasises that each person should have "an equal right to the most extensive liberty", while the second says that social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are to "everyone's advantage".

The undeniable fact is that Western liberals have emphasised the first principle over the second in both theory and practice, prioritising individual liberty and worrying far less about inequality.

They believe that as long as elections take place and people can vote freely and equally, this is a sufficient condition for social stability. It follows, therefore, that those who fail economically do so because of personal incompetence, not social conditions.

Yet there was no doubt when China joined the World Trade Organisation in 2001 that "creative destruction" in developed economies would follow, entailing millions of job losses. These economies' elites – whether in the US, France or elsewhere – had a responsibility to help those who were losing their jobs. But no such help was forthcoming.

Conventional macroeconomic theory remains sound. Mr Trump's policy of running larger budget deficits in good times will bring pain later, while Mr Macron's economic policies will eventually pay off if the French remain patient.

And Mr Macron may yet back reforms that address inequality.



Yellow vest protesters on the streets of Paris last Saturday. The protests against French President Emmanuel Macron's proposed increases in diesel fuel taxes are a sign that the bottom 50 per cent of French society has lost trust in him, says the writer. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

But he is clearly not trusted by the bottom 50 per cent, while Mr Trump is.

For this reason, liberals may have made a strategic mistake by focusing their anger on Mr Trump himself. Instead, they should ask themselves why much of the bottom 50 per cent trust him (and may yet re-elect him). And if they were honest, liberals would admit that they have effectively let the bottom half of society down.

If liberals want to defeat Mr Trump, there is only one route:

Regain the trust of the voters that form much of his base. This will require them to restructure their societies so that economic growth benefits the bottom half more than the top 1 per cent.

In theory, this can be done easily. In practice, however, major vested interests will invariably seek to block reform. The choice for liberals is clear: They can feel good by condemning Mr Trump, or they can do good by attacking the elite interests that contributed to his election. If liberals can do the latter,

Mr Trump's election would be seen by future historians as a necessary wake-up call, while Mr Macron's merely created the illusion that all was well.

These historians might then conclude that Mr Trump's election was ultimately better for American society than Mr Macron's was for France. PROJECT SYNDICATE

• Kishore Mahbubani, a professor in the Practice of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, is the author of *Has The West Lost It?*

Watching Brexit fall apart from across the Channel

Sylvie Kauffmann

PARIS • If French voters, unsettled by the revolt of the yellow vest protesters, are tempted to use referendums to enhance the democratic process, they should look at the sad spectacle across the Channel: The British people trying to pick up the shards of their future after their House of Commons rejected the Brexit deal that Prime Minister Theresa May had spent 18 months negotiating with the European Union – on the basis of a referendum.

It is hard to think of a more powerful deterrent.

Over the past three years, continental Europe watched with bewilderment, despair and exasperation as the world's oldest democracy embarked on a path that no country has tried before – leaving the EU.

We watched the young, ambitious British Prime Minister David Cameron gamble that the June 23, 2016 referendum would strengthen Britain's position within the EU because the vote would be to remain. We watched him fail, resign and disappear.

After a referendum campaign marred by fake news, lies, false promises and attacks against immigrants, we watched Westminster's lively political culture plunge into chaos. We watched a former empire, winner of two world wars, aspire to become Singapore upon Thames.

We watched Brexit ministers under Mrs May, confused by incoherent policies and a nightmarish negotiation, throw in one towel after another.

And we are now observing, dumbfounded, the growing possibility of a second referendum, promoted by smart but desperate people, convinced that it will undo the first one, which approved Brexit by a majority of 51.9 per cent.

From the continent rises the clamour: "Oh, no. Not another one!"

Ironically, the Brexit referendum was won on the promise to "take back control". Sometimes, we wondered whether the British had lost not only control, but also their minds.

We came to dread conversations with our dearest friends from England, now so obsessed with Brexit that they would forget to mention the weather.

As journalists, we felt sympathy for heartbroken British diplomats putting a brave face on a decision that they had to carry out, when deep down, they knew they were heading to disaster. But most of all, this process has taught us about the strength of the EU in a way that we never suspected.

There was Mrs May's surrealistic, elegant love letter to the EU, "our closest friend", to ask for divorce on March 28, 2017.

You don't so easily put an end to 44 years of shared life. Activating Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty to start the process of separation, the Prime Minister insisted that Europe should "remain strong and

prosperous, capable of projecting its values, leading in the world".

"Perhaps now, more than ever," she wrote, "the world needs the liberal, democratic values of Europe." So, one wondered, why on earth leave it?

Indeed, Mrs May herself was initially a "remainer", but would end up exhausting her meagre political capital fighting to deliver the opposite: Such was her fate and such was the absurdity of Brexit.

To be fair, Britain's relationship with the EU was never an easy one. In the 1960s, French President Charles de Gaulle twice vetoed Britain's integration, convinced that Britain would always try to impose its terms on a common market.

Britain finally joined what was then the European Economic Community in 1973 and did shape its single market. Former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's famous "I want my money back" shook Brussels and fed lingering suspicions that the British had joined the EU only to slow it down.

"The British always had one foot in the EU and one foot out – now with Brexit, they want the opposite," French legislator Jean-Louis Bourlanges joked.

But Britain had strong allies among the other member states. Its first-class diplomatic personnel brought welcome expertise to Brussels. Even the French understood that the British were a powerful addition to this extraordinary supranational entity. Hence the idea, sold by the

Brexiters to their voters, that negotiating new terms with the continent would be easy because the EU had so much to lose in this divorce.

It was even expected that other EU countries would follow Britain's example. "Who's next?" was the only question that US President Donald Trump put to European Council president Donald Tusk in a phone call in January 2017, I was told by Mr Anthony Gardner, the

You don't so easily put an end to 44 years of shared life. Activating Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty to start the process of separation, the British Prime Minister insisted that Europe should "remain strong and prosperous, capable of projecting its values, leading in the world". "Perhaps now, more than ever," she wrote, "the world needs the liberal, democratic values of Europe." So, one wondered, why on earth leave it?

American Ambassador to the EU at the time.

It didn't turn out that way. The European Commission designated an affable Frenchman, Mr Michel Barnier, as its chief negotiator and gave him a team of 60, drawn from 19 nationalities.

A former centre-right Member of Parliament, government minister and EU commissioner, Mr Barnier viewed Brexit as "a lose-lose case" and was determined that the union would lose as little as possible.

He understood early that unity would be crucial and repeatedly toured the remaining 27 EU countries to brief their leaders.

Mr Barnier observed "a new feeling of gravity" among European leaders, spurred by the realisation that, faced with Mr Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, Europe must not be weakened by Brexit. So, instead of intra-European infighting and rivalry, London's negotiators met a solid wall of unity and sense of purpose.

The EU became so relevant that exiting the bloc is not an issue anymore, even among the most eurosceptic governments. Some are more patient than others.

Last month, President Dalia Grybauskaitė of Lithuania tweeted her Christmas wish for Britain: "Finally decide what you really want and Santa will deliver."

On Twitter, German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier professed admiration for "the epic struggle of the British people", and more than 20 German politicians and celebrities wrote Britons an

emotional letter saying they "would always have friends in Germany and Europe". Others secretly pray for Britain to finally leave, solve its domestic problems and come back in a decade or two.

The ball is in Britain's court, facing a March 29 date to exit with or without a deal. EU governments are accelerating preparations to face a no-deal catastrophe.

There was another, less glorious lesson from the Brexit saga. The uprising that brought it in 2016 was not, it turns out, isolated.

"We made the mistake of thinking that Brexit was a purely British problem," said an adviser to French President Emmanuel Macron. "It was not. It is a European problem and the yellow vests are part of it."

From west to east and east to west, the revolt against elites and inequalities has spread. The associated lies, the demagoguery, the divisions that are familiar to American voters are now common in Europe.

France, which we assumed had been spared, thanks to Mr Macron's election in 2017, now faces a sombre ritual of weekly violent protests. Glued to the BBC over the past few days, some of us, awed by such riveting political theatre, could not help envying at least the style with which the British have handled their own bout of madness. NYTIMES

• Sylvie Kauffmann is the editorial director and former editor-in-chief of *Le Monde*.

BIG PICTURE



WEATHER

Windy, with passing showers in the afternoon.
High 33 deg C **Low** 24 deg C
24-hr PSI as of 5pm yesterday: 28 to 53 (Moderate)



PHOTO: REUTERS

Icy spectacle at Niagara Falls

Niagara Falls transformed into a winter wonderland as sub-zero temperatures yesterday presented shivering tourists with, quite literally, cool views.

Contributing to the icy vista was a weather system moving over North

America from west to east, which the US National Weather Service said was strengthened by Arctic air from Canada.

But while social media was abuzz with pictures of the “frozen falls”, it is highly unlikely for Niagara Falls

to completely freeze over.

According to the Niagara Falls USA website, surface water and mist in the air turn to ice, but water is still flowing under the sheets of ice.

The volume of water that makes up Niagara Falls combined with the

constant movement of the river make a total freeze nearly impossible, said the website.

The Niagara Falls region is expected to be blanketed with snow for the next few days, with the area bracing itself for more storms.

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18

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Food inflation remained at 1.4 per cent last month, unchanged from the previous two months. The price rises for non-cooked food items and prepared meals stayed broadly the same. For the whole of last year, overall consumer prices rose 0.4 per cent, lower than the 0.6 per cent rise in 2017. ST FILE PHOTO

S'pore's Dec inflation higher than analysts' projections

Rising costs for services and retail items, and smaller decline in accommodation costs

Seow Bei Yi
Business Correspondent

Singapore's headline – or overall – inflation climbed to 0.5 per cent last month compared with the same period in 2017, after falling to a six-month low of 0.3 per cent the month before.

The change reflects higher inflation for services and retail items, as well as a smaller decline in accommodation costs, said the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) and Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) yesterday.

Core inflation, which strips out accommodation and private transport costs, edged up last month as well.

It rose to 1.9 per cent year on year, up from 1.7 per cent in November last year, mainly owing to bigger increases in the costs of services and retail items.

Both figures are slightly higher than expected, with a Bloomberg poll of analysts tipping overall inflation to be 0.3 per cent and core inflation, 1.8 per cent.

But for the whole of last year, overall consumer prices rose 0.4 per cent – lower than the 0.6 per cent rise in 2017. Core inflation for the year went up to 1.7 per cent, from 1.5 per cent in the previous year.

For this year, MAS and MTI expect core inflation to be in the forecast range of 1.5 per cent to 2.5 per cent.

As for headline inflation, they expect it to pick up to 1 per cent to 2 per cent, as the overall drag from accommodation and private road transport costs lessens.

Last month, costs in most sectors rose except for private road transport which fell by 3.7 per cent, and accommodation costs, which slipped 1.9 per cent – moderating from a 2.1 per cent decline in November, owing to a more gradual decline in home rentals.

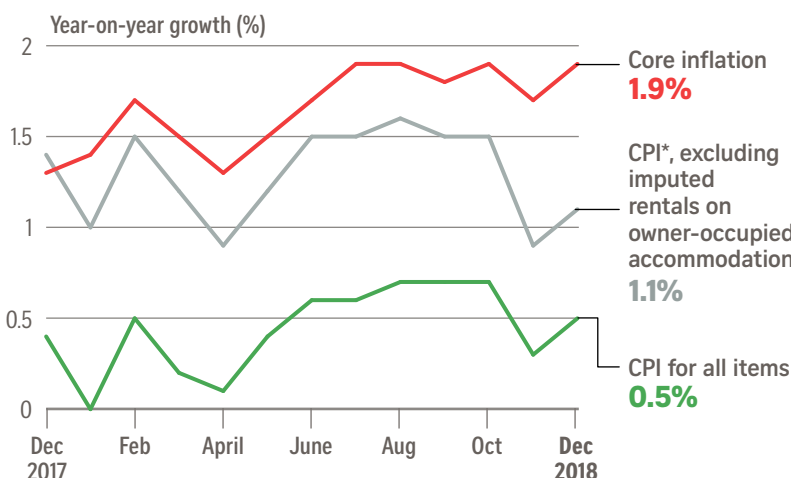
Services inflation went up to 1.5 per cent, from 1.2 per cent in November, owing to a stronger pick-up in holiday expenses and airfares.

Another contributing factor was a smaller decline in telecommunication service fees.

The overall cost of retail items rose 1.7 per cent last month as well, mainly because of bigger increases in the prices of clothing and footwear, as well as household durables.

The cost of electricity and gas rose by 14.6 per cent year on year, lower than the 15.4 per cent rise in November, owing to the effect of the phased nationwide launch of the Open Electricity Market on prices.

December consumer price developments



Meanwhile, food inflation remained at 1.4 per cent last month, unchanged from the previous two months. The reason: Price rises for non-cooked food items and prepared meals stayed broadly the same.

UOB economist Barnabas Gan called the components contributing to the stronger inflation climate last month “expectedly familiar”, with housing and utilities costs steepening for the eighth consecutive month and education seeing its fastest growth figure

since June 2017.

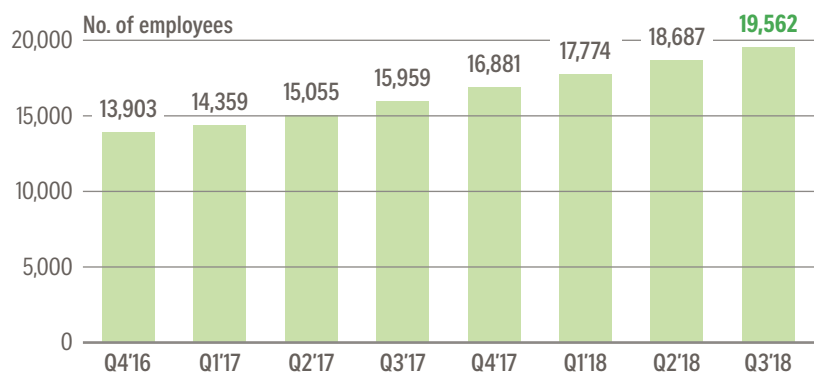
OCBC Bank's head of treasury research and strategy Selena Ling is “more concerned about food inflation and tight labour markets, which may pressure businesses to pass on costs to the consumers”.

She added: “If core inflation crosses 2 per cent year on year and stays above 2 per cent for some months, this may prompt the MAS to consider a third monetary policy tightening this year.”

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Growth of employees in e-commerce businesses in South-east Asia

The number of employees hired by the biggest e-commerce firms in South-east Asia, such as Lazada, Shopee and Tokopedia, grew by about 40 per cent over the last two years.



E-commerce offering more long-term career opportunities

Sue-Ann Tan

While jobs in South-east Asia's e-commerce sector used to be viewed as short-term, the sector is now offering more long-term career opportunities, experts have told The Straits Times.

They were responding to a study released by e-commerce company iPrice Group last month, which said the number of employees in the biggest e-commerce firms in the region grew by around 40 per cent over the last two years.

The study was conducted through LinkedIn and covered Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines. It looked at e-commerce giants such as Lazada, Shopee, Zalora, Tokopedia and Bukalapak.

It found that the workforce of these largest players grew by an average of 808 employees per quarter between the end of 2016 and the third quarter of last year, equivalent to around 40 per cent over the two-year period.

These figures come amid reports of a growing Internet economy in South-east Asia, which is on track to exceed US\$240 billion (S\$326 billion) by 2025, according to a report released last November by Google and Temasek. This economy now stands at US\$72 billion in gross merchandise value (GMV).

However, while people think of short-term roles such as delivery drivers in the e-commerce hiring space, experts said the sector is hiring employees for long-term roles.

Associate Professor Tan Hwee Hoon from the Singapore Management University's (SMU) Lee Kong Chian School of Business said: “The perception (of short-term hires) may have been so five years ago, but now, it is clear that (the industry) is here to stay. Particularly, e-commerce firms need the same types of functions in any organisation such as marketing, finance, research and development, human resources and operations.”

“So clearly, e-commerce as an industry is no different from other industries, except for the fact that its development and scale has grown in leaps and bounds over the last three years.”

According to the iPrice study, operations is the department with the most employees in e-commerce firms, followed by marketing and engineering. The firms also require long-term and specific talents.

Associate Professor Sarah Cheah from the National University of Singapore Business School said: “To stay ahead of competition, in-house expertise such as digital marketing, e-commerce analytics, supply chain and logistics are essential for sustaining the performance of e-commerce business in the long run.”

“The building of these capabilities in Singapore is certainly important for developing professionals with the relevant expertise to fill the long-term job opportunities.”

Hires for the e-commerce space can range from fresh graduates to professionals, managers, executives and technicians (PMETs) who have been re-skilled, experts said.

Associate Professor Trevor Yu from Nanyang Technological University's business school explained: “Because the demand for such talent is high, it is always a challenge to hire and retain such people. Most are hired right out of school or laterally from competing employers or industries.”

“More and more re-skilling opportunities for displaced PMETs are also catered towards such jobs.”

SMU's Prof Tan added: “The key is to re-tool folks who have good understanding of the different areas so that they are able to inform on the current rapid developments of the e-commerce industry.”

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Freehold good class bungalow at Binjai Park up for sale at \$40m

Yongnam Holdings chief executive officer Seow Soon Yong is selling his good class bungalow (GCB) in the Binjai Park enclave with a guide price of \$40 million in a public tender launched yesterday.

The price tag, which works out to \$1,464 per sq ft on a land area of 27,320 sq ft, “will certainly pique buyers' interest”, said Ms Sammi Lim, director of capital markets at marketing agent CBRE.

Tax records for valuation year 2019 show that 98 Binjai Park had an annual value of \$258,000, with the owners listed as Mr Seow and Chong Chiew Mei.

Mr Seow has been chief executive and managing director of main-board-listed structural steel and specialist civil engineering firm Yongnam since 1994.

When contacted, CBRE's Ms Lim said that the family has decided to

sell the house, which was built in 2012, as it is “no longer big enough for their needs”.

The owners have also received inquiries from the market for a while, she added.

It is being sold on a vacant possession basis.

Buyers have the option of renovating or redeveloping the freehold bungalow, which now has a floor area of 13,986 sq ft spread across two floors, including seven bedrooms, two study rooms, an entertainment room, a gym and servants' quarters.

The porch and garage can fit about 20 cars, according to CBRE.

Ms Lim also said that CBRE expects keen interest from both owner occupiers and GCB investors.

The tender closes on March 1 at 3pm.



\$1,464

Property's price per sq ft, on a land area of 27,320 sq ft. The freehold bungalow has a floor area of 13,986 sq ft spread across two floors.

The seven-year-old bungalow is being sold on a vacant possession basis and buyers have the option of renovating or redeveloping it. PHOTO: CBRE



In Fortune magazine's annual list of the World's Most Admired Companies, Singapore Airlines rose from No. 32 last year and No. 33 in 2017. Toyota, Alibaba and Samsung are the other Asian companies to make the Top 50 this year.
ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

SIA climbs to No. 18 in Fortune's Top 50 rankings

It is highest-ranked Asian firm in Most Admired Companies list

Karamjit Kaur
Senior Aviation Correspondent

Singapore Airlines (SIA) has moved up the Top 50 rankings of Fortune magazine's annual World's Most Admired Companies to the 18th spot this year.

The Singapore carrier is also the highest-ranked Asian company and the only company from South-east Asia to make the list. SIA was

ranked No. 32 last year and No. 33 in 2017.

Toyota, Alibaba and Samsung are the other Asian companies to make the Top 50 this year.

Fortune describes its ranking as the "definitive report card on corporate reputations".

It is based on a survey of 3,750 executives, directors and analysts across a range of industries who were asked to rank the companies they admired most in any industry.

The latest accolade adds to the string of honours that SIA has picked up over the years.

In October last year, the airline was named as one of the top 50 "Ge-

3,750

Number of executives, directors and analysts across a range of industries who were asked to rank the companies they admired most in any industry. The Fortune rankings were based on their answers.

nius Companies" in an inaugural annual list compiled by Time magazine.

According to Time, the firms identified are inventing the future, driving progress now and bear watching for what they do next.

Companies were picked based on factors including originality, influence, success and ambition, Time said.

SIA was the only South-east Asian company on the list and one of a small number of Asian companies named, including technology firm DJI and Xiaomi from China, and Nintendo from Japan. It was also the only airline on the list.

As SIA hits the halfway mark in a three-year transformation programme, such recognition, including traveller awards, puts the airline well on track to get back to being the world's best airline, said its chief executive officer Goh Choon Phong.

The programme covers operational enhancements, revenue growth and organisational structure changes, and all three areas have seen significant progress, Mr Goh said in his annual New Year message to staff which was published in the company's in-house publication.

He said: "With the positive momentum... we can be upbeat and assured that we are on the right path to better position the Group for the future."

"Underpinning the programme to date has been our goal to be the undisputed best airline in the world."

"We are well on our way, with so many improvements to the customer experience and recognition in multiple global rankings last year."

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New pan-Asia body to help regional fintech players grow

Ng Jun Sen
Business Correspondent

60

Number of financial institutions from 12 countries and regions that have joined the new committee at the launch, including banks, insurance companies, securities and asset management firms, and financial education institutions.

A new pan-Asia network for fintech players was launched in Singapore yesterday, bringing together Asian fintech start-ups, financial institutions and banks to trade knowledge and expertise in the booming fintech industry.

Launched at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, the Fintech Cooperation Committee serves as a platform for industry players to share the best industry practices with one another, hold high-level regional forums and coordinate policies that can further the fintech ecosystem.

In line with its launch, around 60

financial institutions from 12 countries and regions have joined the new committee, including banks, insurance companies, securities and asset management firms, and financial education institutions.

The first session of the committee, which also took place yesterday, was chaired by the Abu Dhabi Global Market and the Shanghai Stock Exchange. At the session, committee members approved technical specifications for merchant QR codes in mobile payments and a three-year work plan.

The committee was the product of a two-year push by the Asian Financial Cooperation Association (AFCA), a Chinese non-profit body launched in 2016 with the active support of the Chinese government.

AFCA secretary-general Yang Zaiping said the setting up of the committee is meant to uphold openness, inclusiveness, joint governance and shared benefits "with Asian characteristics", paving the way for communication and collaboration by regional fintech stakeholders.

He noted that in the second quarter of last year, Asia surpassed the



Members of the new Fintech Cooperation Committee at its launch in Singapore yesterday. The committee brings together Asian fintech start-ups, financial institutions and banks to trade knowledge and expertise in the booming fintech industry.
PHOTO: ABU DHABI GLOBAL MARKET

United States in venture capital-backed fintech deals and funding, raising more than US\$10 billion (S\$13.6 billion), and that six out of 29 global fintech unicorns are Asian.

"Singapore, with its friendly regu-

latory framework for fintech, plays a key role in the global fintech market," said Mr Yang.

"The Monetary Authority of Singapore has adopted a responsive and forward-looking regulatory ap-

proach to spur the development of promising fintech innovation, which provides invaluable experience for other Asian countries."

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Fed reportedly probing Deutsche Bank over Danske banking scandal

WASHINGTON • The US Federal Reserve is examining how Deutsche Bank handled billions of dollars in suspicious transactions from Denmark's leading lender, according to people familiar with the matter, further intensifying what could be one of the biggest money-laundering scandals ever.

The Fed's probe is in an early stage as it scrutinises whether Deutsche Bank's US operations adequately monitored funds from an Estonian branch of Danske Bank, according to two people briefed on the situation, who asked not to be named because the inquiry is not public.

Danske, which used correspon-

dent banks such as Deutsche Bank to move money abroad, has admitted that much of about US\$230 billion (S\$312.6 billion) that flowed through the tiny Estonian outpost may have been dirty. A Wall Street Journal report in November said Deutsche Bank may have handled about US\$150 billion of the total amount of potentially suspicious transactions tied to Danske.

The United States requires banks operating under its jurisdiction to scrutinise clients and their dealings to detect potential money laundering and alert the authorities to suspicious transactions. The Fed is among regulators that ensure banks have adequate systems in place to fulfil those duties.

A Danske Bank whistle-blower who outlined the illicit flow of cash through that firm has said much of it passed through Deutsche Bank in the US, and one of the people said the Fed is focusing on the German

A Wall Street Journal report in November said Deutsche Bank may have handled about US\$150 billion of the total amount of potentially suspicious transactions tied to Danske.

lender's trust bank. Deutsche Bank has been cooperating with the Fed, the people said.

A spokesman for Deutsche Bank declined to comment on talks with regulators, and a spokesman for the Fed said it does not publicly discuss confidential probes.

ACTING AS CORRESPONDENT

Deutsche Bank chief executive offi-

cer Christian Sewing said last week he has launched a further internal investigation into the lender's role as a correspondent bank for Danske, even though he said he has not seen any evidence of wrongdoing.

The bank had previously reviewed its actions in the case, Mr Sewing said at an event in Berlin. He urged people not to "prejudge" the bank or its employees, presuming their innocence unless proven guilty.

The US Department of Justice and criminal authorities from other countries have launched investigations into Danske Bank's business in Estonia amid accusations it became a European hub for money launderers from the former Soviet Union.

The Danish bank was ordered by its domestic regulator to stockpile an extra US\$1.5 billion in capital to deal with the costs of potential penalties.

Danske relied on the global presence of Deutsche Bank, Bank of

America and JPMorgan Chase to handle conversions of foreign currencies into US dollars on behalf of its clients from 2007 to as recently as 2015, people familiar with the arrangement have said.

Bloomberg reported in November that Deutsche Bank had been contacted by the Justice Department and was thought to have handled the bulk of the transactions under scrutiny. There was no sign at the time that the three firms were themselves targets of the Justice Department's investigation.

Deutsche Bank said that month it has controls in place when acting as a correspondent for other banks, but its ability to know about their clients is limited.

As a correspondent, "your only relationship is with the bank and the bank itself has the responsibility to check its own client to monitor the transaction", a company representative said at the time. BLOOMBERG

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Asian markets end lower or flat amid gloom

STI continues decline, dragged down by financials and industrials

Leila Lai

Amid a cautious trading environment, Singapore stocks continued their downward slide yesterday, with the Straits Times Index (STI) losing 0.68 per cent or 21.6 points to close at 3,171.11.

Investors are finding more reasons for gloom than cheer, with the International Monetary Fund's downgrade of its global growth outlook, Brexit-related uncertainty and the continued partial United States government shutdown.

Hopes for progress in US-China trade ties were also dimmed by reports that Washington had rejected Beijing's offer to hold preparatory talks ahead of a key meeting next week, although the White House denied the reports.

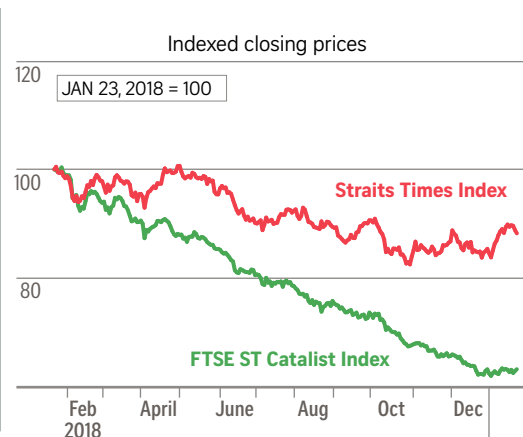
Asian markets were a mixed bag, ending mostly lower or flat.

"With market players clearly keeping a safe distance from riskier assets... stock markets remain in the firing line," FXTM research analyst Lukman Otunuga said. "The declines witnessed across global stocks in recent days continue to highlight how fragile market sentiment remains."

Turnover on the Singapore bourse was about 1.27 billion shares worth \$1 billion. Losers outnumbered gainers 213 to 150.

Straits Times Index

Jan 23, 2019
3,171.11 ↓
-21.60 (-0.68%)
Current streak
3 days
Day high
3,193.89
Day low
3,165.09
52-week high
3,615.28 (May 2, 2018)
52-week low
2,966.45 (Oct 30, 2018)

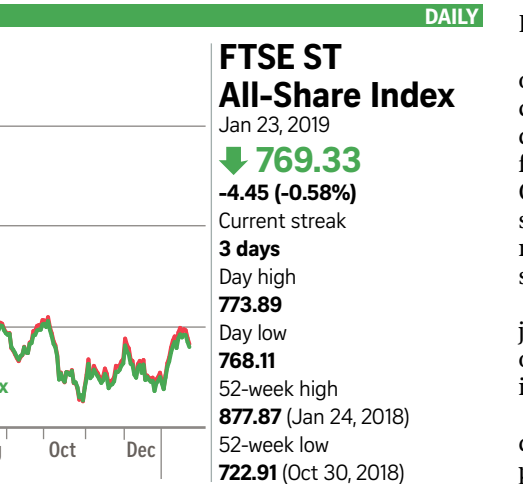


FTSE ST Catalyst Index

Jan 23, 2019
309.71 ↑
+1.56 (+0.51%)
Current streak
2 days
Day high
309.71
Day low
307.22
52-week high
490.47 (Jan 29, 2018)
52-week low
303.76 (Jan 3, 2019)

FTSE ST All-Share Index

Jan 23, 2019
769.33 ↓
-4.45 (-0.58%)
Current streak
3 days
Day high
773.89
Day low
768.11
52-week high
877.87 (Jan 24, 2018)
52-week low
722.91 (Oct 30, 2018)



Several of the most heavily traded stocks ended flat, such as Genting Singapore, which closed at \$1.09 after 45.5 million shares changed hands. Rex International closed at 7.9 cents on a volume of 22.6 million, while JCG Investment Hold-

ings closed at 0.3 cent with 22 million shares traded.

Among STI constituents, financials were the biggest drag, followed by industrials. DBS fell 39 cents to \$24.16. OCBC Bank lost 12 cents to \$11.38 and United Overseas

Bank retreated 36 cents to \$25.66.

Capitaland Mall Trust led gainers on the STI, adding four cents to close at \$2.31. It reported a higher distribution per unit of 2.99 cents for its fourth quarter ended Dec 31. OCBC research analyst Andy Wong said the bank maintains its "hold" rating and \$2.12 target price on the stock for now.

Grand Venture Technology joined the Catalyst board yesterday, opening at 27 cents and closing at its offer price of 27.5 cents.

Singapore's Consumer Price Index for December came in above projections. Headline inflation rose to 0.5 per cent year on year, up from 0.3 per cent in November. Core inflation rose to 1.9 per cent.

UOB's Global Economics and Markets Research team expects this year's headline and core inflation to average 1.5 per cent and 2.2 per cent.

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Sony to move Europe HQ to Netherlands to avoid Brexit woes

TOKYO • Sony will shift its European headquarters from Britain to the Netherlands to avoid Brexit-related Customs issues, but operations at its current British company will remain unchanged, a Sony spokesman said yesterday.

"We are moving the location of our European headquarters' registration to the Netherlands" by the end of March, company spokesman Takashi Iida told Agence France-Presse. The relocation is aimed at avoiding cumbersome Customs-related procedures after Britain leaves the European Union, he said.

The Japanese electronics giant late last year registered a new company in the Netherlands and plans to integrate its existing European headquarters in Britain into the new company. The move will make the firm "a company based in the EU" so the bloc's common Customs procedures will apply to Sony's European operations after Britain relinquishes membership, Mr Iida said.

Sony, however, will not move personnel and operations from the existing British company to the Netherlands and "the only change we will make is the change of registered location of the company", he added.

Several other Japanese firms, including megabank MUFG, Nomura Holdings and Daiwa Securities, have said they are planning to move their main EU bases out of London. The British Parliament rejected Prime Minister Theresa May's withdrawal deal last week, leaving the United Kingdom on course to exit the EU on March 29 with no deal. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Straits Times Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	CURRENCY LAST TRADED SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD%	P/BV
286	245	Ascendas Reit	268	-3	17530	6	1.3
194	161	CapitaCom Trust	183	unch	9861	4.7	1
388	298	Capitaland	327	unch	4837	3.7	0.7
238	195	CapitaMall Trust	231cd	+4	23275	4.8	1.1
1359	780	CityDev	894	+4	2137	2	0.8
251	196	ComfortDelGro	216	-3	6156	4.8	1.8
3128	2265	DBS Grp	2416	-39	4914	5.9	1.4
994	767	DairyFarm USD	US948	+5	432	2.2	-
141	85.5	Genting Sing	109	unch	45540	3.2	1.7
39	22.5	Golden Agri-Res	26.5	+0.5	6190	3.1	0.6
42	23	HPH Trust USD	US25	-0.5	19600	10.5	0.4
744	588	HongkongLand USD	US695	+2	2072	2.9	0.3
6974	5580	JMH USD	US6647	-38	127	2.4	0.7
4148	3155	JSH USD	US3704	-6	360	0.9	0.4
4105	2766	Jardine C&C	3650	+53	455	3.1	1.8
892	567	Keppel Corp	611	-6	2909	3.6	1
1404	1036	OCBC Bank	1118	-12	5832	3.3	1.2
576	455	SATS	475	-6	1381	3.8	3.3
849	672	SGX	741	-2	2134	4	0.4
1184	914	SIA	950	-11	981	4.2	0.8
292	231	SPH	251	unch	2205	5.2	1.1
371	319	ST Engineering	362	-4	2221	4.1	5.3
360	243	Sembcorp Ind	265	+1	3088	1.9	0.7
365	283	Singtel	303	+1	13030	6.8	1.7
94	57.5	ThaiBev	73.5cd	unch	18329	0.9	3.6
3037	2380	UOB	2566	-36	2414	3.9	1.2
934	591	UOL	657	-3	1366	2.7	0.6
2965	1320	Venture Corp	1518	-16	1194	4	1.9
331	297	Wilmar Intl	322	unch	3509	3.1	0.9
164	84	YZJ Shipbldg SGD	133	-1	13653	3.4	1

FTSE ST Large & Mid-Cap Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	CURRENCY LAST TRADED SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD%	P/BV
286	245	Ascendas Reit	268	-3	17530	6	1.3
127	105	Ascott Reit	115	unch	1398	6.2	0.9
77	59	Bumitama Agri	72	+1.5	200	1	1.7
185	143	CDL HTrust	156	-1	1839	-	1
194	161	CapitaCom Trust	183	unch	9861	4.7	1
388	298	Capitaland	327	unch	4837	3.7	0.7
238	195	CapitaMall Trust	231cd	+4	23275	4.8	1.1
1359	780	CityDev	894	+4	2137	2	0.8
251	196	ComfortDelGro	216	-3	6156	4.8	1.8
3128	2265	DBS Grp	2416	-39	4914	5.9	1.4
994	767	DairyFarm USD	US948	+5	432	2.2	-
78	59	Far East HTrust	63	unch	839	-	0.7
197	150	First Resources	169	-1	678	4	2.2
236	211	Fraser's Cpt Tr	226cd	-1	1315	5.3	108.7
116	101	Fraser's L&I Tr	107	-1	9385	6.4	1.1
141	85.5	Genting Sing	109	unch	45540	3.2	1.7
39	22.5	Golden Agri-Res	26.5	+0.5	6190	3.1	0.6
234	167	GuocoLand Ltd	187	+2	249	3.7	0.5
42	23	HPH Trust USD	US25	-0.5	19600	10.5	0.4
744	588	HongkongLand USD	US695	+2	2072	2.9	0.3
6974	5580	JMH USD	US6647	-38	127	2.4	0.7
4148	3155	JSH USD	US3704	-6	360	0.9	0.4
4105	2766	Jardine C&C	3650	+53	455	3.1	1.8
892	567	Keppel Corp	611	-6	2909	3.6	1
130	108	Keppel Reit	118cd	+1	5049	4.7	0.8
576	455	MI	475	+1	1381	3.8	3.3
273	170	Man Oriental USD	US187	-2	140	1.6	1.4
175	152	Mapletree Com Tr	172	-1	6384	5.3	1.2
213	184	Mapletree Ind Tr	196cd	-2	3946	6	1.3
138	118	Mapletree Log Tr	133cd	-1	9207	5.7	1.2
128	107	Mapletree NAC Tr	119	-1	4558	6.3	0.9
83.5	73	NetLink NBN Tr	71	-0.5	7107	-	1
1404	1036	OCBC Bank	1138	-12	5832	3.3	1.2
215	136	OE	147	unch	68	2	0.3
92.5	64.5	OE HTrust	70	+0.5	539	-	0.9
250	157	Olam Intl	180	-1	274	4.2	0.9
60.8	28	Oxley	29	-0.5	882	5.2	0.8
306	256	ParkwayLife Reit	273	+1	1066	4.9	1.6
121	98	Raffles Medical	111	unch	813	2	2.6
455	365	SATS	475	-6	1381	3.8	3.3
849	672	SGX	741	-2	2134	4	0.4
1184	914	SIA	950	-11	981	4.2	0.8
337	220	SIA Engineering	253	+1	343	5.1	1.9
292	231	SPH	251	unch	2205	5.2	1.1
106	98	SPHREIT	102	unch	706	5.4	1.1
371	319	ST Engineering	362	-4	2221	4.1	5.3
360	243	Sembcorp Ind	265	+1	3088	1.9	0.7
281	149	Sembcorp Marine	163	-2	4223	1.2	1.5
58	39	Silverlake Axis	40	unch	953	7.5	5.8
147	88.5	SingPost	98	unch	1054	3.6	1.3
365	283	Singtel	303	+1	13030	6.8	1.7
299	158	StarHub	177	-1	982	9	5.4
78	63.5	StarhillGbl Reit	71.5	+0.5	6931	6.4	0.8
217	163	Suntec Reit	187cd	+1	8427	5.4	0.9
94	57.5	ThaiBev	73.5cd	unch	18329	0.9	3.6
10.2	3.7	Thomson Medical	7.4	unch	3728	-	2.7
3037	2380	UOB	2566	-36	2414	3.9	1.2
934	591	UOL	657	-3	1366	2.7	0.6
2965	1320	Venture Corp	1518	-16	1194	4	1.9
331	297	Wilmar Intl	322	unch	3509	3.1	0.9
244	183	Wing Tai	201	-2	448	4	0.5
164	84	YZJ Shipbldg SGD	133	-1	13653	3.4	1
190	116	Yanlord Land	127	+1	1656	5.4	0.5

FTSE ST Small-Cap Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	LAST SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD%	P/BV
145	129	AIMSAMP Cap Reit	136	-1	199	7.6	1
70.5	48	Accordia Golf Tr	52.5	-0.5	167	7.3	0.6
90.5	74	Ascendas-hTrust	81.5	+0.5	475	-	0.8
119	99	Ascendas-iTrust	107	-2	222	5.7	1.2
58.5	12.2	Asian Pay TV Tr	12.8	unch	1589	50.8	0.2
65	48	Banyan Tree	58.5	unch	23	1.7	0.8
281	115	Best World	269	+1	952	15	9.6
85.5	76	Boustead	79	-1.5	132	3.8	1.2
126	79.5	BreadTalk	89.5	unch	139	7.8	2.4
658	521	Bukit Sembawang	558	-2	10	3.2	1.1
88	65.5	Cache Log Trust	74.5	+0.5	1536	9.7	1.1
55	39.5	Centurion	40.5	unch	214	6.2	0.7
169	104	China Aviation	115	-1	561	3.9	1
47.5	29.5	China Everbright	35	unch	126	14	0.7
165	90.5	China Sunshine	127	unch	513	2.4	1.4
107	64	Chip Eng Seng	69.5	unch	345	5.8	0.6
53.5	31.5	Cosco	35.5	+0.5	1584	-	1.5
700	302	Delong	603	-	-	-	0.6
28	17.5	Duty Free Intl	20.5cd	unch	660	9	1.3
79	67.5	EC World Reit	72	+0.5	60	8.4	0.8
59.5	47	ESR-REIT	53cd	unch	4647	7.3	1.1
142	92	First Reit	102xd	-1	556	8.4	1
152	134	Fraser's Com Tr	146cd	+1	1013	6.6	0.9
82.5	66.5	Fraser's HTrust	71.5	unch	484	-	0.9
27.5	16.4	Geo Energy Res	20	unch	907	5	1.2
91	70.5	HRnetGroup	79	-0.5	25	2.9	2.4
69	52	Health Mgt Intl	54	unch	15	0.6	5.2
279	73	Hi-P Intl	90	-1	3384	27.8	1.4
283	252	Hong Leong Fin	261	-2	41	5	0.6
82.5	71	IREIT Global	73.5	-0.5	337	8.1	1
41.5	18.3	Indofood Agri	21	unch	384	-	0.2
79.5	43	Japfa	78.5	+1.5	3625	0.6	1.5
84.5	49	KSH	52.5	-0.5	0	4.2	0.9
86.9	53	Kep-KBS Reit USD	64.5	-0.5	177	-	0.5
148	128	Keppel DC Reit	147cd	+3	11595	4.8	1.4
188	132	Keppel T&T	187	unch	547	19	1.2
119	7	KrisEnergy	85	-0.1	5837	-	1
79	44.5	Lian Beng	50.5xd	-0.5	116	4.5	0.4
42.5	18	Lippo Malls Tr	21.5	+0.5	847	16	0.8
53	30	MM2 Asia	34	-1	257	-	1.9
98.5	69.5	Manulife Reit USD	84	+1.5	674	6.6	0.7
120	95	Metro	99	-0.5	89	5.1	0.6
32	5	Noble	81	susp	-	-	-
66.9	45	OUE Com Reit	48	unch	203	9.7	0.5
68	54	PEC	58	unch	25	3.4	0.6
46	17	POSH	18.5	-0.4	188	-	0.5
64.5	44.5	Q&M Dental	49.5	unch	50	3.3	3.5
117	55.5	QAF Ltd	71.5	-2	131	7	0.8
83	70	RHT HealthTrust	76.5cd	-0.5	14629	5.9	1
124	96	Riverstone	113	+3	37	2	3.7
55	22	SIIC Environment	30.5	+0.5	38	-	0.5
45	38	Sabana Reit	41.5	+0.5	295	8	0.8
119	90	Sheng Siong	112	+1	590	2.9	6.2
25.5	10.3	Sino Grandness	10.3	-0.2	853	-	0.1
70.5	56	Soilbuild&BizReit	62cd	unch	2294	8.5	1
129	80.5	Tianjin ZX USD	86	-1	9	-	0.7
50	32.5	Tuan Sing	38.5	-0.5	309	16	0.5
136	54	UMS	61	-1.5	2223	8.2	1.4
112	58.5	Valuetronics	68	-1	1358	6.7	155.7
16.8	8.3	Ying Li Intl	12	-0.4	7359	-	0.3
53	24	Yoma Strategic	36	unch	1846	0.7	0.9
37.5	16.1	Yongnam	17.5	-0.4	832	-	0.3

Senior BMW exec defects to rival Audi

Hildegard Wortmann was its senior VP in charge of Asia-Pacific

Christopher Tan
Senior Transport
Correspondent

BMW is losing one of its senior executives, who has quit to join rival Audi as a board member.

Ms Hildegard Wortmann, 52, senior vice-president in charge of BMW's Asia-Pacific region, has been based in Singapore since last January. She led a team of four who were previously based in BMW's headquarters in Munich, Germany.

When contacted, the Bavarian company said her successor had not yet been confirmed.

Ms Wortmann will move on to a bigger role and a bigger group. She starts in July as Audi's board member for sales and marketing, a job based in Audi's headquarters in Ingolstadt, Germany.

Audi is part of the Volkswagen Group, which has 10 brands under it.

Ms Wortmann, one of a few women to rise to top management in the male-dominated automotive industry, joined BMW in 1998. She had been involved in the launch of various products, including the Mini brand, and BMW's X and Z ranges.



Ms Hildegard Wortmann has been based in Singapore since last January, but her new job at Audi is based in Germany.

The Audi position opened up when previous board member of sales and marketing Bram Schot was promoted to chief executive. The previous head, Rupert Stadler, was arrested and jailed last year for his role in Volkswagen's diesel-emissions scandal. Audi has since fired him.

Mr Schot said in a statement: "Audi is undergoing significant

changes and we are now taking the next step. With Hildegard Wortmann on the board of management and together with the workforce, we are succeeding in transforming ourselves. On this challenging path to the future, she will play a decisive role."

Meanwhile, another former BMW senior executive has joined electric appliance maker Dyson to head its electric car venture.

Mr Roland Krueger, 53, a former senior vice-president at the Bavarian group, was once stationed in Singapore as head of BMW Asia. He was most recently president of Infiniti - Nissan's luxury arm.

With Dyson moving its headquarters here, Mr Krueger is likely to return to Singapore - and chicken rice, which he has proclaimed to be his favourite local dish.

The Straits Times understands that Mr Krueger was roped in to Dyson by board member Ian Robertson, another BMW veteran. Mr Robertson, who has retired, had held top positions in the BMW Group, including sales and marketing roles, and as CEO of Rolls-Royce Motor Cars, which BMW owns.

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Buoyed by the acquisition of a 70 per cent stake in Westgate mall (right), CapitaLand Mall Trust posted a 4.3 per cent growth in net property income on the previous year for the fourth quarter to Dec 31, 2018. PHOTO: CAPITALAND



CapitaLand Mall Trust DPU up 3.1% to 2.99 cents for Q4

CapitaLand Mall Trust (CMT), which owns 15 shopping centres in Singapore, saw its net property income and gross revenue grow year on year in the latest quarter, buoyed by the acquisition of a 70 per cent stake in Westgate mall.

It posted a 4.3 per cent growth in net property income on the previous year for the fourth quarter to Dec 31, 2018.

Gross revenue was up by 4.7 per cent to \$180.5 million, according to full-year financial results released yesterday.

Higher gross rental income at IMM and Bedok Mall contributed to the increase in gross revenue. But JCube, Lot One Shoppers' Mall and Clarke Quay saw lower occupancies, which ate into revenues.

Investors can look forward to a higher distribution per unit (DPU) of 2.99 Singapore cents in total, against 2.9 Singapore cents for the same quarter in the year before.

Distributable income stood at \$108.1 million, or 5.1 per cent more than before. Annualised distribution yield for the three months was 5.22 per cent, based on CMT's closing price on Tuesday.

Mr Tony Tan, chief executive of the manager, noted that CMT had divested Sembawang Shopping Centre in June last year and increased its stake in "a higher-yielding quality asset", Westgate, to spruce up the portfolio.

CMT had a portfolio occupancy rate of 99.2 per cent as at Dec 31 last year, with rental reversion of 0.7

per cent. The weighted-average lease expiry by gross rental income was 1.9 years - excluding Funan, which was closed in July 2016 for redevelopment.

But Mr Tan said Funan is on track to open in the second quarter of this year and has reached leasing of more than 80 per cent, including the leases that are still "under active negotiations".

For the 12 months, CMT clocked net property income of \$493.5 million, or 3.2 per cent up on the previous year, on gross revenue growth of 2.2 per cent to \$697.5 million.

Distributable income rose by 3.8 per cent to \$410.7 million and full-year DPU was 11.5 Singapore cents, against 11.16 Singapore cents the year prior.

Interbank currency rates

Currencies	Against US\$		Jan 23	
	Bid	Offer	Against US\$	Change
US\$/US\$ to one unit of foreign currency:				
Australian dollar	0.9695	0.9703	0.7131	0.7134
Canadian dollar	10200	10206	0.7504	0.7502
Euro	15445	15453	11360	11362
NZ dollar	0.9222	0.9228	0.6783	0.6785
Sterling pound	1.7623	1.7631	1.2962	1.2963
US dollar	13596	13601	-	-
US\$/US\$ to 100 units of foreign currency:				
Chinese renminbi	20.0256	20.0365	14.7291	14.7317
Danish kroner	20.6856	20.6963	15.2144	15.2168
Hong Kong dollar	1733	1734	12.7452	12.7463
Indian Rupee	191	191	14.038	14.040
Indonesian rupiah	0.0096	0.0096	0.0070	0.0071
Japanese yen	12401	12409	0.9121	0.9123
Korean won	0.1204	0.1207	0.0886	0.0887
Malaysian ringgit	3.284	3.289	24.1546	24.1838
New Taiwan dollar	4.3979	4.4038	3.2347	3.2378
Norwegian krone	15.8292	15.8396	11.6425	11.6459
Philippine peso	25.70	25.791	18.954	18.963
Saudi riyal	36.2492	36.2664	26.6617	26.6645
Swedish krona	15.0794	15.0891	11.0910	11.0941
Swiss franc	136.2052	136.3059	100.1803	100.2205
Thai Baht	4.2809	4.2851	3.1486	3.1506

MSCI INDICES

	Jan 22	Index	In local curr % of dy	% yr Change
World Preliminary	1515.0	-0.9	5.1	
EAFE Preliminary	1051.1	-0.6	4.3	
Europe Preliminary	1465.1	-0.6	4.3	
Australia	1177.6	-0.7	3.2	
Austria Preliminary	530.8	-0.8	6.6	
Belgium Preliminary	978.2	-0.5	6.9	
Canada Preliminary	1954.5	-0.8	6.8	
Denmark Preliminary	7774.9	-0.1	5.0	
Finland Preliminary	706.8	-0.6	8.2	
France Preliminary	1760.2	-0.4	2.7	
Germany Preliminary	889.5	-0.5	5.4	
Greece Preliminary	46.2	1.6	6.4	
India	1269.3	-0.3	0.5	
Indonesia	7479.8	0.1	5.7	
Ireland Preliminary	190.5	0.1	6.3	
Israel Preliminary	246.3	0.1	6.8	
Italy Preliminary	660.1	-1.0	6.1	
Japan	932.8	-0.6	4.4	
Korea	631.1	-0.5	4.5	
Malaysia	589.3	0.5	1.3	
Netherlands Preliminary	1503.1	-0.9	3.1	
New Zealand	138.8	-0.7	4.6	
Norway Preliminary	2932.7	-0.9	5.3	
Pakistan	399.9	1.4	12.1	
Philippines	1362.6	-0.2	8.0	
Portugal Preliminary	83.9	-0.8	3.9	
Singapore	1662.2	-1.1	4.3	
Singapore Free	357.4	-1.1	4.3	

Government securities

GOVERNMENT BONDS							Jan 23
Period	Issue code	Coupon rate (%)	Maturity	Close Bid	High	Day's Low	
2-Year	NY05100N	3.250%	01-Sep-20	101.92	101.92	101.92	
5-Year	NX13100H	2.750%	01-Jul-23	102.84	102.94	102.85	
10-Year	NX18100A	2.625%	01-May-28	103.34	103.47	103.40	
15-Year	NZ13100V	3.375%	01-Sep-33	110.83	110.85	110.85	
20-Year	NZ16100X	2.250%	01-Aug-36	95.93	0.00	0.00	
30-Year	NA16100H	2.750%	01-Mar-46	101.8	101.95	101.95	
Note: Based on latest issue				Source: Monetary Authority of Singapore			

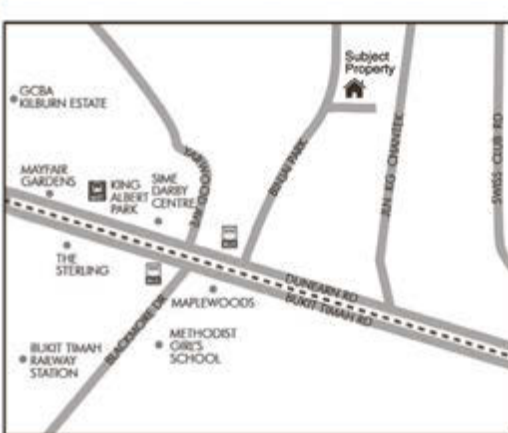
Note: Based on latest issue

Source: Monetary Authority of Singapore

Hotel investment sales get boost from investors, developers

BIS Singapore Novena is latest in list of Singapore hotels to go on market or have been sold

Today in THE BUSINESS TIMES



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TOP AGENTS OF THE YEAR AWARD 2018

MOST ACTIVE AGENT OF THE YEAR AWARD 2018



Catherine Ng
(R0469480)



Ryan Chau
(R048390J)



Vivian Yang
(R046941Z)



Eric Chia
(R0470780)

TOP AGENCY OF THE YEAR AWARD 2018

MOST ACTIVE AGENCY OF THE YEAR AWARD 2018



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With Deepest Sympathy and Heartfelt Condolences
To the Family of the late




Professor Tan Cheng Lim
Head, Department of Paediatric Medicine (1977-1997)
Departed on 21 January 2019

A gentleman, mentor and leader who will be deeply missed.

From medical & nursing staff
Department of Neonatal & Developmental Medicine



We, the family of Andrew Goh,



wish to express our heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to all priests and religious, relatives, friends, colleagues and ex-colleagues, for your unceasing prayers, comfort, kind words of encouragement, attendance, invaluable assistance and contributions during this time of bereavement.

Thank you for being the angels in Dad's life, and being part of our lives and our family - joining us to listen to his stories, laugh at his jokes, enjoy his wit, and slurp up his meals.


Special thanks to Rev Fathers Adrian Yeo, J Jeannequin, Joseph Kace; Dr Thomas Seng; doctors and nurses of Ward 73, SGH; and friends and prayer groups from the Church of Immaculate Heart of Mary, Catholic Spirituality Centre and Saint Joseph Dying Aid Association.

8 Years
24 January 2019
*"Her children arise and call her blessed:
her husband also, and he praises her:" Proverbs 31:28*



Betty Teo Lock Neo
Wife, Mother, Grandmother
We miss you, Mummy/Grandma
Pa/Grandpa is with you now, together again
Husband, Harry Seet (deceased 20 Dec 2018)
Always remembered by your Children:
Victor, Angelina, Patricia, Linda
In laws: Belinda, Patrick, Andrew
Grandchildren: Stephanie, Jonathan, Tessa, Valerie,
Christopher, Rachel, Tricia, Nicholas, Vanessa

22nd Anniversary of the passing of



Coleen Valerie Ly nee Lesslar
Born 22nd May 1951
Loving wife and mother passed away
24th January 1997

As the years roll by and the eyesight dim, the pain of loss becomes a dream and the flame of love request no sleep. The dedication and love of a wonderful wife and mother is etched in our hearts forever.

We will always miss her dearly

Jean-Paul, Olivia, Lianne and Daniel

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sight and afterwards return again.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

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SPORT

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NAOMI OSAKA'S WIN STREAK AFTER
TAKING THE FIRST SET C8PUTTING THE FUN IN
JUNIORS' SCHOOL GAMESPupils to get more playing time as changes
in game formats aim to make sport enjoyable

Nicole Chia

Krupa Palaniappan remembers feeling sad last year, warming the bench during the National School Games (NSG) and coming on only when her teammates were injured or during "easy" basketball games.

From this year, however, the Kranji Primary School pupil will get more playing time following changes to the NSG junior division, for ages nine to 11, that the Ministry of Education unveiled at the NSG opening ceremony at the OCBC Arena yesterday.

Basketball is one of 12 sports that

will undergo changes this year in areas such as game formats, equipment, awards and recognition and the use of substitutes.

One change to the format will see each school field three teams of three to five players while games are played in two six-minute periods on half a court. Previously, a team of 12 would contest five-a-side games on a full court in four 10-minute periods.

All three teams earn points for the school, towards a final ranking

in the group stages or a result in the knockout stages.

Said 10-year-old Krupa, a Primary 5 pupil, of these changes: "It's better because you have more opportunities and more space, so you can play better. Everyone has a chance to play and they won't think they are bad just because they don't get chosen to play."

Also, in track and field, athletes will no longer compete in specialised events such as the 100m.

They will instead take part in a multi-event competition, where they each have to run, hurdle and throw in the same race.

Participants get achievement pins based on how far they throw and how fast they run, for example, instead of their final race positions.

Former Singapore sprinter and two-time Olympian C. Kunalan lauded this change, saying: "It makes sense; at that age, running 100m or 200m or 300m is crazy. If you are training for these events at such a young age I feel that after some time you'll get fed up."

"Of course there will be a couple of young ones who won't mind doing this forever because they're just born like this. But how many 'born-like-this' kids do we have?"

"We don't want to lose any of the

kids too early. This kind of thing will keep the fun element there and they won't get too injured too early or (suffer) psychological burnout."

All 21 sports in the junior division would have underwent the changes by 2021. The process started last year in three sports – golf, rugby and sailing.

This follows the review, which started in 2015 and was completed last year, of the NSG competitions.

Said Tan Chen Kee, MOE's divisional director of its student development curriculum division: "The review was started because first we wanted to look at our students' initial encounter with sports and how we can strengthen that – how we can make it a lot more enjoyable, less competitive and how can we adopt a long-term athlete-development view of things and... help the children slowly ease into the competition and the sports."

Senior Minister of State for Education Chee Hong Tat added: "These enhancements will enable our young athletes to enjoy their sporting experiences, have more opportunities to participate in competitions, and develop character and values through sports."

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Structural changes

AWARD AND RECOGNITION
SYSTEMS (INDIVIDUAL
EVENTS)

Top eight performers, instead of the four best, in individual events will be recognised where applicable.

Criterion-based recognition, such as timings in track and field and the number of pinfalls in tenpin bowling, will be introduced in relevant sports.

COMPETITION FORMATS
(MATCH-BASED SPORTS)

Teams will play a classification round followed by a tiered round, where they will compete against teams of similar abilities. This allows teams that are otherwise eliminated early in the current knockout competition format to double the number of matches they play.

AGE-GROUP DIVISIONS
(NON-CONTACT SPORTS)

Pupils aged 11 will be given the opportunity to play either in the junior (ages 9-11) or senior (ages 12-13) divisions in 11 non-contact sports, based on their readiness. This will be assessed by teachers and coaches.

Technical changes

GAME FORMATS

Sports like basketball and floorball will become smaller-sided games played on smaller courts. This allows players to have more touches of the ball, which helps athletes master their game and movement skills.

SPORTING EQUIPMENT

Age-appropriate equipment will be used in sports such as tennis so that student-athletes can grasp the proper playing techniques. In tennis, regular tennis balls will be replaced with balls which are slower and have a lower bounce so that players can focus on mastering the proper strokes.

SUBSTITUTION RULES
(MATCH-BASED SPORTS)

To create more opportunities for more players to gain competition experience, substitution rules for match-based sports will require most, if not all, substitutes to play at some point in the match.

This is like European football - there's the Champions League and the Europa League, and both can be very exciting. This is one of several changes we're making to school games competition, to improve learning and developmental experiences for our students, through sports.

EDUCATION MINISTER

ONG YE KUNG, commenting on Facebook on the new tiered structure in certain National School Games competitions, which allows pupils more game time.

Tia Foong Po Shiun (left) from Haig Girls' School's football team and Victoria Junior College's high jumper Kampton Kam jointly lighting the torch with Senior Minister of State for Education Chee Hong Tat at yesterday's opening of the National School Games at the OCBC Arena.



Andi Mustakeem (left) and Adam Aqil, both from Qihua Primary School's sepak takraw team, juggling the ball. The NSG junior division will undergo changes in areas such as game formats, equipment, awards and recognition and the use of substitutes.
ST PHOTOS: TIMOTHY DAVID



Transformed Rusada moving in right direction: Wada

LONDON • The Russian Anti-Doping Association (Rusada) has "completely changed" and is now a "very efficient and good anti-doping organisation". This is the assessment of World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada) director general Olivier Niggli in an interview with Agence France-Presse.

Speaking after the body decided to take no further action against Rusada on Tuesday for missing the Dec 31 deadline to allow access to the Moscow laboratory at the cen-

tre of alleged state-sponsored doping, he insisted things were moving in the right direction after years of the Russians dragging their feet.

Wada conditionally lifted a ban on Rusada in September last year, a decision roundly criticised by several athletes and United States anti-doping chief Travis Tygart, with one of the conditions being Wada allowed access to thousands of samples at the tainted Moscow lab.

But when a Wada team arrived last month, Russian authorities

raised issues with the certification of their equipment, which led to the delay before the data was finally extracted earlier this month.

However, Niggli felt Wada was right not to impose further sanctions even if the decision was not "universally popular".

Touching on Rusada's "transformation" as one of the positives to emerge from the affair, he said: "It's a new organisation. This is a very promising thing going forward because having a good anti-doping sys-

tem in Russia is what everybody needs. That's the key to the future."

As for the analysis of the data, Niggli said Wada would know only "in a few months" but feared there could potentially be several hundred doping cases, adding: "What we need now is to see if the further data we got, the raw data will back up what we already have and will provide sufficient evidence so that these cases can be prosecuted."

The lawyer also insisted Wada had learnt a lot from the scandal

and were now better equipped.

Calling on critics like Tygart, who took umbrage with Tuesday's announcement, to lay off, he said: "I hope it will stop. I hope people will realise all we have done so far is to strive to get this data so we can get justice and get to the bottom of it."

"People have to understand there is a process to be followed... We are the regulator. If we deviate from our role just to satisfy the impatience of some, this is not going to take us forward."

But German Olympic supremo Alfons Hormann, who yesterday slammed the Russian let-off as "difficult to support", claimed the decision "did not help to strengthen faith in Wada and the worldwide fight against doping".

Wada's decision is the latest chapter in a saga that surfaced with Richard McLaren's 2016 report detailing doping in the country from 2011-15 involving more than 1,000 athletes from over 30 sports.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, DPA

WOUNDED SPURS OUT TO TACKLE THE BLUES

Tottenham ‘not sulking’ about injuries, despite Alli joining Kane on the sidelines

LONDON • Such was Mauricio Pochettino’s confidence in Dele Alli adapting to a “false nine” role that Tottenham were not going to reinforce their front line, even after the ankle injury suffered by Harry Kane and Son Heung-min’s absence due to the Asian Cup.

However, the Spurs manager’s plans not to spend in the January transfer market were thrown into disarray on Tuesday night after scans confirmed his worst fears.

Alli suffered a hamstring injury during last Sunday’s 2-1 Premier League win at Fulham and the club revealed he would now undergo rehabilitation and is expected to return to training in early March.

The midfielder, who is set to miss a host of key games including the Champions League last-16 first leg against Borussia Dortmund and a league match at Chelsea, tweeted he was “gutted” with the diagnosis.

He said: “I will do everything in my power to return as quick as possible. Thank you for the messages.”

The 22-year-old’s six-week spell on the sidelines comes at the worst time for Spurs, with the club looking to defend their one-goal lead go-

ing into today’s second leg of their League Cup semi-final with Chelsea.

They will travel to Stamford Bridge without Kane, who is out till March, Son and Alli, and Sky Sports pundit Paul Merson felt now was “a good time” to play Tottenham.

He told Sky: “If you could say before the game that you can pull out three players from that team, then it would be Kane, Alli and Son.”

But Eric Dier insisted Spurs could not feel “sorry for ourselves” and it would not be an excuse if Pochettino’s men fail in their attempt to lift their first piece of silverware since 2008.

Insisting the team were not “sulking about it”, the midfielder said: “Every team gets injuries, we have to deal with it.”

There was better news as they bid to reach their first final in four years while exacting a measure of revenge against the team that beat them in the 2015 League Cup final.

Moussa Sissoko and Victor Wanyama have returned to training along with Lucas Moura who, after a three-game absence, is expected to feature in Alli’s absence.

There were also reports of unrest in their London rivals’ dressing room.

Manager Maurizio Sarri publicly questioned his men’s mental strength and revealed it was “extremely difficult” to motivate them in the wake of last Saturday’s 2-0 defeat at Arsenal.

While Sky pundit Gary Neville said on his weekend podcast it was now “inevitable that Sarri would get the sack at some point”, Marcos Alonso has backed his boss and challenged his teammates to prove they have what it takes to arrest their slide, starting with Spurs.

Amid suggestions that several players are unhappy with his tactics, including playing N’Golo Kante and Eden Hazard out of position while favouring Jorginho, Alonso claimed the Blues manager’s criticism was justified.

The Spain defender said: “When you lose, you learn. We have to perform again (against Spurs).”

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

CHELSEA V TOTENHAM

Singtel TV Ch111 & StarHub Ch202, tomorrow, 3.45am

SportsWorld

Albirex face Home in Community Shield

Singapore Premier League (SPL) champions Albirex Niigata will play last season’s runners-up Home United in the Community Shield at the Jalan Besar Stadium on Feb 23.

From 2014 to 2018, the Community Shield also doubled up as a league match. But no league points will be up for grabs in this fixture this year.

The SPL will start on March 2, with Geylang International hosting Albirex at Our Tampines Hub and Young Lions taking on Balestier Khalsa at Jalan Besar.

China’s Zhou faces three-month ban

China’s world No. 61 men’s singles paddler Zhou Yu has been banned for three months by the Chinese Table Tennis Association, according to the South China Morning Post.

The former world No. 13 was disqualified at last week’s Hungarian Open after he intentionally damaged his bat, in hope of replacing it, during his first-round match against Chinese Taipei’s Chuang Chih-yuan.

Woods plans to make use of new flag rule

LOS ANGELES • Tiger Woods plans to take advantage of a new rule that allows players to leave the flag in the hole while putting, the former world No. 1 said ahead of his first start of the season at the Farmers Insurance Open.

The United States Golf Association implemented a host of new rules this year designed to speed up the pace of play and Woods has identified situations at Torrey Pines where leaving the flag in would help.

The 14-time Major champion revealed he also practised leaving the flag in when putting downhill as it could be “more advantageous on faster greens with a little more slope like Augusta”. REUTERS

Beckham buys 10% stake in Salford City

LONDON • David Beckham has bought a stake in English non-league football side Salford City, following in the footsteps of his former Manchester United teammates who have invested in the “really special club”.

The 43-year-old secured a 10 per cent stake, which Salford announced yesterday, joining Ryan Giggs, Gary and Phil Neville, Paul Scholes and Nicky Butt as share owners.

The “Class of 92” now own 60 per cent of the club but Singapore billionaire Peter Lim remains the largest shareholder, with the remaining 40 per cent.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



Emiliano Sala has yet to play in Cardiff City’s colours, but Bluebirds fans have been leaving tributes, including jerseys and yellow daffodils outside the stadium for their record signing. PHOTO: REUTERS

Search for Sala ‘no longer a rescue operation’

LONDON • The search for missing Cardiff City player Emiliano Sala should no longer be considered a rescue operation, said the chief officer of Channel Islands Air Search last night.

“It’s getting to that stage now,” he said in a telephone interview. “There’s a lot of people still on the hunt,” said John Fitzgerald, adding that hopes of finding survivors are “very much plucking at straws”.

A joint French and British search effort resumed yesterday with air-planes, helicopters and ships.

Sala, who signed for Cardiff on Saturday from French Ligue 1 club Nantes for a club-record fee of £15 million (\$\$26.4 million), was flying to the Welsh capital on a sin-

gle-engine Piper PA-46 Malibu aircraft when air traffic controllers lost contact with it off the English Channel island of Guernsey.

Floating objects have since been found in the Channel and, at press time, the operation was ongoing.

The Argentinian Sala reportedly sent a voicemail message to his father saying he was frightened the plane was about to breakup.

In a transcript of the call, quoted by the Mirror, he said: “I’m here on a plane that looks like it’s about to fall apart, and I’m going to Cardiff...”

“If in an hour and a half you have no news from me, I don’t know if they are going to send someone to look for me because they cannot find me. But you know... Dad, how

scared am I!”

He sent a similar audio message in Spanish to a group of friends on WhatsApp, said Diego Rolan, a Uruguayan footballer who told a radio station in his home country that he was among the recipients of the message.

The man speaking sounded calm, asking his friends how they are doing, looking forward to joining his new team, complaining of being tired, and even yawning. But he also returned several times to his concern about the flight.

Hundreds of fans, many in tears, also gathered in Nantes’ city centre on Tuesday evening for an emotional tribute to the missing player, laying bouquets of yellow flowers

while chanting Sala’s name.

His former club said in a statement the tribute was a spontaneous initiative by fans before thanking “supporters and the entire football family for the numerous expressions of support”.

Amid the outpouring of grief, many have wondered why Sala was travelling in a propeller plane, but Cardiff told news website Wales Online they had offered their new striker a commercial flight.

“We spoke to the player and asked him if he wanted us to make arrangements for his flight to have been commercial,” club chairman Mehmet Dalman said.

“He declined. I can’t tell you who arranged the flight because I don’t

know at this stage, but it wasn’t Cardiff.”

Dalman added Bluebirds manager Neil Warnock was in a “state of shock”.

He said: “Neil is human and he’s affected as much as we all are. At the moment, there’s a vacuum of information, it’s very unsettling.

“We’re still praying, we still have prayers. Cardiff will be involved with the investigation. We won’t leave a single stone unturned until we have all the facts.”

According to the BBC, Cardiff have no plans to rearrange their next match, a Premier League trip to Arsenal next Tuesday.

NYTIMES, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, THE GUARDIAN

Football ‘fun while it lasted’ for businessman Bolt

KINGSTON (Jamaica) • Usain Bolt is giving up on his dream of forging a career as a professional footballer following his trial last year with the Central Coast Mariners.

In remarks published by Jamaican media outlets on Tuesday, the retired eight-time Olympic sprint champion revealed he had drawn a line under his hopes, saying “the sports life is over” for him.

The 100m and 200m world record-holder was unable to agree a deal with the Mariners in November after a trial.

He made his debut for the Australian A-League side in September, but despite scoring twice in his second trial match, serious questions remained over his general play and ability to turn into an elite athlete in a second sport.

Bolt turned down an offer from Maltese club Valletta, reportedly because the club could not afford his wage demands, and also spent time training with Norwegian team Stromsgodset and German Bundesliga side Borussia Dortmund.

Although the athletics icon told

reporters last month he had not given up hope of becoming a footballer, it appears his priorities now lie elsewhere. At an event in Kingston on Monday, he told TV Jamaica he had no regrets but now planned to concentrate on his business career.

He added: “I don’t want to say it (the trial) wasn’t dealt with properly, but we went about it, not the way we should and you learn your lesson, you live and you learn.

“It was a good experience. I really enjoyed just being in a team, and it

was most different from track and field. It was fun while it lasted.

“I’m now moving into different businesses, I have a lot of things in the pipeline, so as I say, I’m just dabbling in everything and trying to be a businessman now.”

The 32-year-old was speaking as he handed over a US\$1 million (\$\$1.3 million) cheque to help fund his country’s team at the Special Olympics World Summer Games in the United Arab Emirates in March.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS, THE GUARDIAN

PRO DREAM OVER

I really enjoyed just being in a team, and it was most different from track and field... I’m just dabbling in everything and trying to be a businessman now.



USAIN BOLT, on having no regrets over not becoming a professional footballer.

FOUR-DIGIT DRAW

Jan 23 2019

FIRST ♦ 7039
SECOND ♦ 2883
THIRD ♦ 9268

STARTERS

0439 2343 2806
4322 6351 7079
7179 7817 8972
9835

CONSOLATIONS

0438 1647 1711
2411 2918 3186
3196 5380 8160
8391

Australian Open 2019

INNER PEACE KEEPS OSAKA RAGING

US Open champ thirsty for more after making semis, attributes success to her cool head

MELBOURNE • Having tasted her first Grand Slam success at the US Open last year, Naomi Osaka now wants to win another after progressing to her maiden Australian Open semi-final yesterday.

She not only stayed on course for glory at Melbourne Park after blowing away Elina Svitolina 6-4, 6-1, but also moved into pole position for the world No. 1 ranking, which could even be decided by the time the semi-finals conclude.

Post-match, the 21-year-old, who

is aiming to become just the 10th player to lift the New York-Melbourne double, fired a warning to the rest of the contenders that another Major was close after setting up a last-four clash with Karolina Pliskova today.

In her on-court interview, she said: "This is something that I have been working on a lot, which is trying to get deeper in tournaments more consistently. I have been able to do that."

"But for me, right now, I just try to

keep looking forward. So I'm not really satisfied. I am happy that I'm here but, at the same time, I'm so close and I just want to keep going. There are more matches to win."

Osaka, the first Japanese woman to reach the last four in Melbourne since Kimiko Date in 1994, added: "I already know that to be here is something that a lot of people want... but you want to do the next big thing."

That Flushing Meadows final, overshadowed by Serena Williams' infamous meltdown that led to a game deduction for the American on account of verbal abuse and a fine for three code violations, prompted Osaka to work more on

the mental aspects of her game during the off-season.

She told reporters: "I feel right now most people know me for (the) US Open, right? And during US Open, I didn't show any emotions most of the time."

"When I'm not calm, it just makes my life harder... there is an inner peace I can tap into sometimes during my matches, and it's kind of hard to get to, but once I'm there, it's really easy. Not easy, but nothing can really bother me."

The world No. 4 showed plenty of zen despite distraction caused when her Ukrainian opponent needed treatment for neck and shoulder injuries in the second set.

The WTA Finals Singapore champion looked nowhere near her best, but the Japanese felt Svitolina "was still really tough".

And Osaka knows she lacked the required fitness to challenge, unlike the big-serving Pliskova. Acknowledging the Czech was up 3-2 in their head-to-head meetings, Osaka admitted the world No. 8, who is also in the running to reach the sport's summit, was "a little bit dangerous".

"I can barely read her serve, so it's very difficult for me," she said.

"She doesn't hit too many unforced errors."

But Li Na, who remains the only Asian-born player to have won two

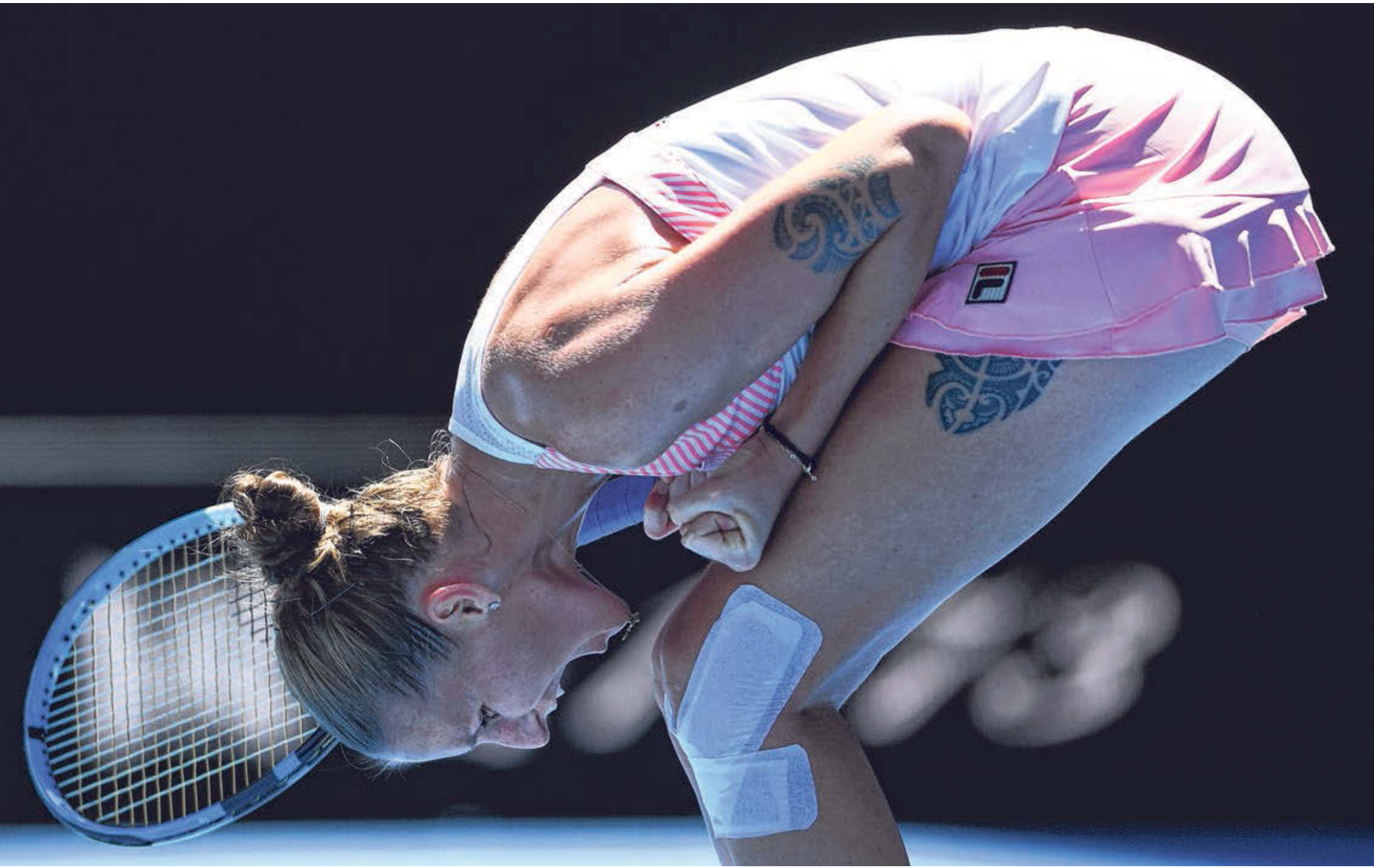
Majors, has tipped Osaka to match her feat, adding that "her quality and focus is really impressive".

In the men's draw, world No. 1 Novak Djokovic reached the semi-finals for the seventh time after eighth seed Kei Nishikori of Japan retired injured when trailing 6-1, 4-1 in their quarter-final clash.

The Serb will meet Lucas Pouille tomorrow, after the Frenchman reached his first Grand Slam semi-final by ousting Canada's Milos Raonic 7-6 (7-4), 6-3, 6-7 (2-7), 6-4.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

AUSTRALIAN OPEN
Day 11: Singtel TV Ch114 & StarHub Ch208, 8am & 4.30pm



Determined not to suffer the pain of defeat, Karolina Pliskova (left) battled from 5-1 down in the third set to beat Serena Williams 6-4, 4-6, 7-5 in the Australian Open quarter-finals yesterday. PHOTO: DPA

Following her defeat, Williams (below) has not won a Grand Slam title since her win in Melbourne two years ago, as she bids to equal Margaret Court's record of 24 victories. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SportingLife

A professor of winning falls to puzzling defeat



Rohit Brijnath

Assistant Sports Editor
In Melbourne

Everyone great falls, it's how sport eventually gets even. Everyone brilliant trips, it's why we watch. Everyone exceptional collapses, it's how we remember invincibility is a notion not a truth.

No one is immune to the laws of sport, to loss and indignity, to frustration and falls. Even the ones with cabinets stuffed with trophies have a small storeroom of heartbreak.

Tiger Woods had a two-shot lead at the 2009 PGA Championship and was 14-0 in Majors when he was atop the leaderboard going into the fourth round, but lost to Y.E. Yang. Brazil lost 7-1 to Germany, at home, in the semis, at the World Cup.

There is a divinely drunk scriptwriter out there who decides to occasionally rewrite endings and he has an active imagination. Yesterday he decided that at 5-1 in the third set of an Australian Open

quarter-final was when Serena Williams – who had four match points – was going to fold. This was like Wonder Woman trapping Ares and tripping over her lasso.

Karolina Pliskova starts by leading by a set and a break and this is danger, but hardly disaster, and maybe even fortuitous for it gives Serena a chance to show off what crowds adore: The annoyed champion, the gear change, the string of games, the resurgence.

And Serena does win nine of 11 games and the planets align and the Open organisers stop perspiring. Except she rolls her ankle and doesn't call the physio, perhaps because she is 5-1 up in the third set and the physio can wait till

the handshakes are done which will be in a moment which never comes. Maybe it's just one of her many errors.

"I think (Karolina) just played lights out on match point, literally hitting lines," she said. "Just went crazy on match point. She just played unbelievable on match point." And it's true, imminent defeat provokes desperation, and Pliskova agreed: "I went for it. I just said, 'Like whatever. Maybe this can be over, but let's just try this game'."

It's always striking the way Serena holds her racket, rarely by the throat and mostly just by the handle. It looks like a hammer in her hand and it makes you think of nails and coffins. It's why neither Pliskova's response, nor the turned ankle, adequately explains Serena's third set slump from 5-1 to 5-7.

Champions thrive on strife, they vomit and run, bandage themselves and tackle, as if to show nothing defeats them. Champions also force slumps, they don't trigger their own slides. Losing six straight games is bewildering from a champion who has the lead, the momentum, the crowd and the skill.

On court, Serena packs and leaves rapidly and even though she's a young mother, only 10 months back on tour and not yet a perfectly tuned instrument, she has to be in some shock because with 796 tour victories (335 in Grand Slams) she could teach a class at Harvard on winning. And yet she's lost this one.

Later she arrives at the press conference and speaks in an even tone as clicking cameras produce a background music. Her last Grand



Slam at the US Open ended dismally, but this one gracefully. No finger pointed, no excuse given.

A reporter kindly tries to offer some perspective and attempts to sketch a bigger picture of an "incredible comeback" that's fallen a bit short but she's too brave to take refuge. "The big picture for me is always winning. I'm not going to sit here and lie about that. But it hasn't happened yet, but I feel like it's going to happen."

Maybe, of course, she and her 37-year-old friend from Basel are just getting older. Like beautiful blades with blunter edges. Like imposing palaces whose paint is gently flaking. Still grand but not as great, quick but not as fast, confident but not as sure, consistent but not as solid every match. Only they will know precisely what they have lost, but will rarely speak of it. Part of greatness must be bluff.

She lost in finals to Angelique Kerber at Wimbledon 2018 and

Naomi Osaka at the US Open. He, Roger Federer, wasted a two-sets-to-love lead against Kevin Anderson at Wimbledon and was a set up against John Millman at the US Open and Stefanos Tsitsipas here and lost to both.

Federer as front runner is not the threat it was.

Serena and Federer are not the same story nor on the same hunt. He has 20 Grand Slam singles titles, the most among men, and another looks unlikely. She has 23, wants two more, and is very close.

They're 37, run like 27, but now their latest rivals are 20 and 21. Life is not fair which is once what their rivals said.

All defeat hurts but you wonder if it's harder now? Once a tennis life stretched before Serena but now her Slams are rationed. Only so many chances remain in which to make history. A number not high. And as of yesterday, smaller still.

rohitb@sph.com.sg

SPORTS FIXTURES HIGHLIGHTS				
Event	Home	Away	Timing	Venue
Thu, 24 Jan 2019				
Asian Cup	Vietnam	Japan	9.00pm	LW*
Fri, 25 Jan 2019				
Asian Cup	China PR	Iran	12.00am	LW*
English League Cup	Chelsea	Tottenham	3.45am	LW*
French Cup	Amiens	Lyon	4.00am	LW*

LW* : Telecast available at Livewire (Marina Bay Sands) only
Visit singaporepools.com for the latest 'Live' telecast listing.

LOTTERY	
TOTO	Thu, 24 Jan 2019, 6.30pm Draw No. 3443/2019
Group 1 Prize \$1,000,000 est.	
Draw Venue: Singapore Pools (Private) Limited, 210 Middle Road, #01-01, Singapore 188994	

No person under the age of 18 years shall be allowed to purchase a ticket or to claim any prize.


LW: Livewire (MBS) & Livewire (RWS) (21 years and above)
LiveWire (Singapore Pools) (21 years and above during 'Live' telecast)
SB: SportsBuzz (Singapore) (21 years and above)

Singapore Pools Account Service. Call 6786 6688 for more details.

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Stay Legal. National Problem Gambling Helpline: 1800-6-888-688

RCR Reg No.: 196000020



Champions thrive on strife, they vomit and run, bandage themselves and tackle, as if to show nothing defeats them. Champions also force slumps, they don't trigger their own slides. Losing six straight games is bewildering from a champion who has the lead, the momentum, the crowd and the skill.

SPORT

HEAT'S UP FOR SENTOSA FINALE

American triathlete Zaferes targets a good showing at S'pore leg of Super League series

Laura Chia

Katie Zaferes expects the Feb 23-24 Super League Triathlon finale in Sentosa to be hot and humid, and highly competitive.

But the current top-ranked triathlete would not have it any other way as she looks to defend her lead in the inaugural series and prepare for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

"I need to be able to compete against the best people in my sport under stressful circumstances in any type of weather and different types of courses," she told the media in Singapore over a conference call on Tuesday from Santa Cruz, California, where she is based.

"All these things are in the Super League so racing the series will

make me stronger," she said, adding that the "faster" races will improve her speed and endurance as she has races on both days.

The eliminator race on Feb 23 has three stages, each comprising a 300m swim, a 5km bike ride and a 2km run, with a 10-minute break between each race.

The top 15 in the first stage advance to the next stage, where they will compete to be among the top 10 for the third and final stage.

The next day, the enduro has three continuous rounds, each with a 300m swim, a 5km bike ride and a 1.6km run.

The public can take part in either the team enduro or fun run events, racing the same course at One15 Marina as the professionals.

"Singapore is an added bonus be-

cause of the weather. Tokyo is projected to be one of the hottest and (most) humid races," said Zaferes, who was 18th in her Olympic debut in Rio three years ago.

"It's great to be able to train for both of these things at the same time and see what works and what doesn't."

Average temperatures in Tokyo in the summer months typically range from 23 to 31 deg C.

With Singapore's temperatures in February expected to range from 24 to 33 deg C, the 29-year-old said the key is hydration. She said: "It's way easier to recover and perform if your body has the right amount of fluids so hydration will be really important in Singapore."

But the American believes it will be the little things, like maintaining race positions during transitions, that determine the outcome.

"I just make sure I'm preparing myself to hit each of these targets," she said. "If I hit them, hopefully



Katie Zaferes beginning her swim in Malta where she won the gold medal after topping both the equaliser and eliminator categories. The American is aiming for a medal at next year's Tokyo Olympics. PHOTO: SUPER LEAGUE TRIATHLON

the outcome will be whatever I'm hoping for."

Zaferes tops the overall standings with 71 points after she won in Jersey and Malta and was second in Mallorca – ahead of compatriot Kirsten Kasper (54) and Rachel

Klamer (40) from the Netherlands. Vincent Luis of France, on 75 points, leads the men ahead of Henri Schoeman of South Africa (63). The March 23-24 Bali event is a qualifier for next season.

Her ultimate goal is to win a

medal in Tokyo. She said: "It will most likely be my final Olympics if I qualify. I'd like to finish in a way that I'd be proud of and feel like I've nothing left to prove."

claura@sph.com.sg



Smith proves his playmaking worth

DALLAS • Dallas Mavericks coach Rick Carlisle was visibly giddy. Owner Mark Cuban was upbeat, too, trying to convince reporters that player-team discord happens all the time.

Dennis Smith Jr? It was impossible to tell from his facial expressions before, during and after Tuesday's 106-98 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers how he felt about returning from a fortnight-long self-exile from the team.

But it has always been hard to read Smith. The most emotion he showed in the National Basketball Association game was following his

alley-oop lob from just behind mid-court. DeAndre Jordan's dunk gave Dallas a 99-93 lead and Smith extended his arms and pointed at him.

In his first game since Jan 7, Smith contributed 17 points, eight rebounds and four assists, while Rookie of the Year front runner Luka Doncic added 17 points.

Although Carlisle sounded definitive last Saturday when he described Doncic as a point guard, Smith's return moved Doncic to shooting guard.

"But we have two point guards," he said. "That's the beauty of it. And in today's game, you've got to have

two dynamic playmakers."

One factor in Smith's temporary departure from the team, Mavericks sources told The Dallas Morning News, was down to the pair head-butting over the 21-year-old's on-court decision-making.

The larger factor, the same sources said, was Doncic's emergence as the team's best player and facilitator, which relegated Smith to a secondary ball-handling role.

While Carlisle has won more games than any Mavericks coach before him in his 11 seasons, including the 2011 title, he has a reputation for being particularly demanding of

point guards. But Cuban refuted that narrative, insisting: "There's never been a coach who hasn't had disagreements with players or issues with players."

"With Rick, not only did we win the championship, he knows what we expect. He knows how we want to get there. And he's a good coach."

A source in Smith's inner circle told The News last week that while he likes the team and his teammates, the Mavericks simply did not appear to be a good basketball fit.

For now, and at least one rollicking night, they did. DPA

Dallas Mavericks guard Dennis Smith Jr driving to the basket past LA Clippers forward Tobias Harris at the American Airlines Centre. The Mavericks won 106-98 to improve to 21-26. PHOTO: REUTERS

My Melody Run to debut in May

Fans can look forward to another Sanrio-themed run on May 12, with My Melody Run making its world-wide debut in Singapore.

Participants in the 5km fun run at Sentosa will receive a series of exclusive merchandise including a My Melody runner's T-shirt, plush toy, bib, goodie bag and medal.

There will also be a carnival site with games and activities, such as a human claw machine.

There will be a special appear-

ance by My Melody herself so that fans can get up close and personal with the white rabbit.

Finance analyst and Sanrio fan Tania Bin, 28, said: "I'm so excited. I love all Sanrio characters and it would be great to add to my collection of memorabilia."

Another Sanrio-themed fun run is the Hello Kitty Run, which was first held here in 2014. Other similar runs include the My Little Pony: Friendship Run 2016 and the Star

Wars Run Singapore.

Said a Sanrio Hong Kong spokesman: "We've been looking to bring My Melody Run to South-east Asia for quite a while now. We're fully aware of how passionate the Singaporean fans can get over Sanrio characters. This will be the first of hopefully many more to come."

For more information, visit www.mymelodyrun.com.sg

Xener Gill

Kitted up for Swiss spot



The Singapore women's floorball team are headed to Bangkok, where they will attempt to book a spot for the Dec 7-15 Women's World Floorball Championship in Neuchatel, Switzerland. On Tuesday, captain Amanda Yeap (No. 22) and vice-captain Jowee Tan (No. 16) were presented with Thorb jerseys for the Jan 27-Feb 1 qualifiers. With them is Loh Hui Nee, a director with Nexia TS, a major sponsor for the team since 2017. World No. 15 Singapore are in Group B with Japan (14th), South Korea (24th) and Malaysia (26th). The top teams from Groups A and B, as well as the two winners in the play-offs between the two groups' runners-up and third-placed teams, will qualify for the championship. PHOTO: SINGAPORE FLOORBALL ASSOCIATION

life

D **OSCAR NOMINATIONS**
Two nods for Singaporean sound editor Ai-Ling Lee
D2



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DESIGN: SALLY LAM PHOTOS: NBCUNIVERSAL, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Fan power

Such is the might of social media these days that an outpouring of fan outrage can rescue television shows like Brooklyn Nine-Nine from the brink of cancellation. [Alison de Souza](#) dissects this and other successful fan campaigns. **D4**

Brooklyn Nine-Nine stars (from far left) Andre Braugher, Andy Samberg, Melissa Fumero and Joe Lo Truglio.

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Oscar nominations

Small signs of change in Hollywood

Streaming platforms at least have a seat at the big table now, as do non-English works



John Lui
Film Correspondent

Even after a year marked by a shake-up in the voting membership aimed at making it more diverse, the Oscar nominations (announced on Tuesday night Singapore time) once again showed that the Hollywood elite favours prestige over dollars and stability over change.

Even so, there were a couple of surprises, showing that even if women and minorities do not always get a fair shake, streaming platforms such as Netflix now at least have a seat at the big table, as do non-English works such as the mostly Spanish drama *Roma*.

The list contained a couple of pieces of bad news for Singapore-related films, but it put a smile on at least one Singaporean's face.

Sound editor Ai-Ling Lee, 39, with Mildred Iatrou, picked up her second Oscar nod for Sound Editing for *First Man*. With Jon Taylor, Frank A. Montano and Mary H. Ellis, she got her second nod for Sound Mixing for the same movie, giving her four Oscar nominations to date.

A surprise came early on in the nominations, in the first category announced by the hosts, comedian-actor Kumail Nanjiani and comedienne-actress Tracee Ellis Ross.

Mexican actress Marina de Tavora from the Netflix drama *Roma* got a nod, a trend few had foreseen. An overwhelming number had opted for Claire Foy, who played Neil Armstrong's wife Janet in Damien Chazelle's biopic *First Man*. Foy was left out, as was Michelle Yeoh. Some felt Yeoh's first Academy nod would come after her compelling turn as the matriarch Eleanor in the romantic comedy *Crazy Rich Asians*.

Another sign the Academy is getting better at reflecting American demographics is the seven nominations earned by *Black Panther*. Its listing in Best Picture, where it stands alongside "serious" movies such as *Green Book*, *Vice*, *Roma* and *The Favourite*, marks the

first time a comic book superhero film has broken into that most prestigious of categories.

It is significant that the film, with its mostly black cast, is a crowd-pleaser and not a serious drama as Best Picture nominees with mostly black actors have tended to be. It shows that such films can be judged by how well made they are, rather than how their messages resonate with the mostly white voting bloc.

The other major upset was in the Best Director category. Actor-director Bradley Cooper's handling of the musical drama *A Star Is Born* put his name on many tip sheets, but he failed to land a nomination. Instead, the slot went to Poland-born Pawel Pawlikowski for his period love story, *Cold War*.

Also left out of the Best Director club was Peter Farrelly, helmer of the civil rights comedy-drama *Green Book*, now showing in Singapore.

Green Book recently won the Producers Guild Awards' top honour, making it a strong contender for winning Best Picture. However, if it does, it will belong to the small club of movies with that honour without its director also winning Best Director.

Crazy Rich Asians, a commercial hit that features a Singaporean setting, walked away with nothing from the Oscars mahjong table, despite garnering two Golden Globe nominations and a Screen Actors Guild Award nomination for Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture.

The Singapore entry in the Best Foreign Language Film category, the period thriller *Buffalo Boys*, failed to secure a slot, though this was not an unexpected result.

Singapore-born director Sandi Tan's documentary about her teenage film-making adventures around the island, *Shirkers*, was tipped by some to be an Oscar attention-getter for Netflix, along with Alfonso Cuaron's *Roma*, a drama set in the Mexican director's childhood home in Mexico City in the 1970s.

But Tan's work was shut out, along with another widely tipped favourite, *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*, a look at the life of American children's television host Fred Rogers.

Still, *Roma*'s sweep of 10 nominations, for which it ties with period black comedy *The Favourite* for the most nods this season, is a sign that the Academy today has no problems supporting films that will never be released widely in traditional cinemas.

In that respect, at least, the Academy is showing signs of embracing the future.

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From far left: Oscar nominees Alfonso Cuaron (Best Director), Yalitza Aparicio (Actress in a Leading Role) and Marina de Tavora (Actress in a Supporting Role) of *Roma*, a mostly Spanish drama from streaming platform Netflix which bagged 10 nominations. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

In the running

Best Picture

- *Black Panther*
- *BlackKkKlansman*
- *Bohemian Rhapsody*
- *The Favourite*
- *Green Book*
- *Roma*
- *A Star Is Born*
- *Vice*

Director

- Spike Lee (*BlackKkKlansman*)
- Pawel Pawlikowski (*Cold War*)
- Yorgos Lanthimos (*The Favourite*)
- Alfonso Cuaron (*Roma*)
- Adam McKay (*Vice*)

Actor in a Leading Role

- Christian Bale (*Vice*)
- Bradley Cooper (*A Star Is Born*)
- Willem Dafoe (*At Eternity's Gate*)
- Rami Malek (*Bohemian Rhapsody*)
- Viggo Mortensen (*Green Book*)

Actress in a Leading Role

- Yalitza Aparicio (*Roma*)
- Glenn Close (*The Wife*)
- Olivia Colman (*The Favourite*)
- Lady Gaga (*A Star Is Born*)
- Melissa McCarthy (*Can You Ever Forgive Me?*)

Actor in a Supporting Role

- Mahershala Ali (*Green Book*)
- Adam Driver (*BlackKkKlansman*)
- Sam Elliott (*A Star Is Born*)
- Richard E. Grant (*Can You Ever Forgive Me?*)
- Sam Rockwell (*Vice*)

Actress in a Supporting Role

- Amy Adams (*Vice*)
- Marina de Tavora (*Roma*)
- Regina King (*If Beale Street Could Talk*)
- Emma Stone (*The Favourite*)
- Rachel Weisz (*The Favourite*)

Singaporean gets two nods for *First Man* work

Singaporean sound editor Ai-Ling Lee earned two nods at the Oscar nominations announced on Tuesday night Singapore time.

The 39-year-old, with Mildred Iatrou, picked up her second Oscar nod for Sound Editing for *First Man*. With Jon Taylor, Frank A. Montano and Mary H. Ellis, she also got her second nod for Sound Mixing for the same film, giving her four Oscar nominations to date.

In an e-mail interview, Lee says that "it is an honour to be nominated by my peers in the Academy for *First Man* and to be in such good company with the other nominees".

"I owe my nominations to our exceptional sound team and to (director) Damien Chazelle, whose brilliant film provided the opportunity for sound to help create the immersive and perilous world of Neil Armstrong's journey to the moon and back."

The drama stars Canadian actor Ryan Gosling as American astronaut Armstrong and English actress Claire Foy as his wife.

With American film-maker Chazelle, Lee was part of the team that helped the musical *La La Land* (2016) land 14 nominations, winning six.

In contrast, *First Man* on Tuesday night scored four nods, all in the technical areas of Visual Effects,



Sound editor Ai-Ling Lee picked up Oscar nominations for Sound Editing and Sound Mixing for the Neil Armstrong biopic *First Man*.

Sound Editing, Sound Mixing and Production Design.

Its lack of Oscar acclaim, compared to the laurels showered on *La La Land*, is nothing to be upset about, Lee says.

"Damien Chazelle made a very immersive and intimate story about Neil Armstrong. We are very proud of the film we made," adds the sound editor, who moved to Los Angeles at age 19 and knocked on doors to land a job in sound production.

Syrian refugee shines in *Oliver Twist* role

REVIEW / DRAMA

CAPERNAUM (NC16)
123 minutes/Opens tomorrow at GV Paya Lebar/★★★★☆

The story: The film opens in court. Zain (Zain Al Rafeea), a street kid in a Lebanese slum, is suing his parents for the act of giving birth to him, thus introducing him to a life of misery. In a flashback, he is shown to labour from morning till dusk, delivering gas bottles and hawking drinks. He is denied school because his parents have sold him into slavery in exchange for rent and food for his many siblings. Zain snaps and runs away into an underworld of oddballs, human traffickers, Syrian refugees and overstayers such as the Ethiopian cleaning woman, Rahil (Yordanos Shiferaw).

John Lui

This Lebanese film is the winner of the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival, where it is said to have won a 10-minute round of post-screening applause. It is also up for the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film alongside Alfonso Cuaron's *Roma* and Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Shoplifters*.

That acclaim should not be a surprise as this emotionally gripping but flawed work ticks all the checkboxes for a work that festival fans love – a tough social-realist drama centred around a child's point of view.

Lebanese film-maker Nadine Labaki has a knack for communicating the misery of life at the bottom without falling into the usual artistic traps of romanticisation (also known as "poverty porn") or its opposite, shock-value gruesomeness.



She portrays Zain's plight in matter-of-fact terms. In briskly edited scenes that give the impression of unrelenting drudgery without dwelling on it, Zain is shown hauling gas bottles across town on a cart and hurling surprisingly foul curses at the paedophiles and cheats that try his patience.

Thankfully, whoever created the English subtitles seems to have

taken pains to transmit the pungency of the dialogue.

Some have accused Labaki of manipulation, of making an artless tearjerker that packs in too many tones and messages.

There is some truth to that claim – there are passages here, especially in the final scenes, that could have benefited from restraint.

What sticks in the mind, how-

Refugee Zain Al Rafeea plays a street-wise yet heartbreakingly naive kid in a slum who sues his parents for giving birth to him. PHOTO: ANTICIPATE PICTURES

ever, is the performance by boy actor Zain, a Syrian refugee discovered by Labaki. His part calls for him to be a near-feral, *Oliver Twist* of a boy – both street-wise and heartbreakingly naive.

Zain feels as if he was born to play the role. He even looks like Mark Lester, the child actor who played the title role in *Oliver!*, the 1968 film adaptation of the Charles Dickens novel about orphans and runaways on the streets of Victorian London.

The Dickens influence is strong here. Unfortunately, it has seeped into the film's weakest area, its dramatic structure, which can feel forced.

But what should stay in the mind are not the story details, but the impression of a class-divided Lebanon as seen through the eyes of one plucky, foul-mouthed boy.

• Capernaum screens exclusively at GV Paya Lebar tomorrow and on Saturday at 7pm.

Green Book lacks shades of grey

Viggo Mortensen and Mahershala Ali share chemistry in the drama comedy dealing with racial oppression

REVIEW / DRAMA COMEDY

GREEN BOOK (PG13)
130 minutes/ Now showing/★★★★☆

The story: Frank Vallelonga (Viggo Mortensen) is an out-of-work nightclub bouncer trying to provide for his family in New York City in the 1960s. He gets a tip – a musician wants to hire a driver. He meets the gifted but aloof jazz pianist Don Shirley (Mahershala Ali), who is looking for someone to drive him through a concert tour of the racially segregated South. Based on a true story.

John Lui
Film Correspondent

This movie is very much part of the awards-season tradition of films that deal with the American legacy of racial oppression, but contain a white protagonist.

That white person is an audience surrogate whose eyes are opened to how awful things really are for African Americans, but sometimes is also there to deliver a walloping, verbal or otherwise, to the bad guys.

Green Book includes the dual white-person roles: Mortensen's Vallelonga is the innocent becoming aware of evil and also the one who stands up to it.

He begins as a casual racist, the way most working-class urban whites would be in the 1960s, but is shaken when he meets the vicious, bone-deep racism of the South.

The odd-couple comic set-ups feel easy and unforced and there is genuine chemistry between the



brash Vallelonga and stuffy Shirley.

The film this week garnered five Academy Award nominations, for Best Picture, Best Actor (Mortensen), Supporting Actor (Ali), Original Screenplay and Film Editing.

Director Peter Farrelly's work with his brother Bobby defined comedy for a generation. Dumb And Dumber (1994) and Me, Myself & Irene (2000), among other works, normalised the idea that sweet, life-affirming films can fea-

ture defecation jokes.

However, the film is held back, as so many films about oppression are, by a reluctance to create shades of grey in the main characters, as if any hint of unlikeability about them would render them worthless.

Mortensen's New York Italian-American accent needs some work, but Farrelly shapes a mood of prickly conviviality between the two characters that is light and precise.

Of the two, Ali offers the more moving performance.

Shirley is an eccentric who might not have been much more than a collection of quirks. But Ali breathes life into the portrayal, making him a man who is immediately recognisable as the artist who revels in being labelled a genius, but for whom the title has become a cage from which he cannot escape.

Green Book stars Mahershala Ali (left) as a gifted but aloof jazz pianist and Viggo Mortensen as his driver.

PHOTO: SHAW ORGANISATION

johnlui@sph.com.sg

Top10Movies

SINGAPORE

1. (-) Glass
2. (1) Escape Room
3. (-) The Upside
4. (2) Aquaman
5. (3) Bumblebee
6. (4) More Than Blue
7. (5) Make It Big Big
8. (8) Mary Poppins Returns
9. (10) Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse
10. (7) Master Z: The Ip Man Legacy

Information from Cinematograph Film Exhibitors Association

UNITED STATES

1. (-) Glass
2. (1) The Upside
3. (2) Aquaman
4. (-) Dragon Ball Super: Broly
5. (4) Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse
6. (3) A Dog's Way Home
7. (5) Escape Room
8. (6) Mary Poppins Returns
9. (7) Bumblebee
10. (8) On The Basis Of Sex

Information from boxofficemojo.com



One Cut Of The Dead stars Takayuki Hamatsu (centre) as a director filming a zombie movie when a real zombie apocalypse occurs. PHOTO: SHAW ORGANISATION

Low-budget but heart-warming Japanese zombie comedy

REVIEW / ZOMBIE COMEDY

ONE CUT OF THE DEAD (NC16)
96 minutes/Opens today/★★★★★

The story: In an abandoned building, a team of film-makers are trying to shoot a zombie movie. When a real zombie apocalypse occurs, the director of the movie, Higurashi (Takayuki Hamatsu), insists on keeping everyone trapped there and the cameras continue to roll.

Yip Wai Yee

The best way to enjoy this film is to not know anything about it beforehand, so just take my word for it and maybe stop reading this review right now.

If you need to know more, it is an ultra-low-budget Japanese film featuring a zombie apocalypse and it is often very, very funny.

Word of mouth about the film was so strong when it premiered in Japan in November 2017 that it went on to make more than 250 times its budget of three million yen (\$\$37,300).

The film kicks off with a single 37-minute take of a bunch of actors and an increasingly impatient director trying to shoot a zombie movie.

This segment looks grainy, schlocky and technically problematic as handheld cameras are seen dropping on the floor and the actors often appear awkward and forget their lines.

It is a relatively entertaining opening act, although not particularly

fresh in the zombie movie genre.

It is only after this segment is over that the hype over One Cut Of The Dead makes sense as it goes "behind the scenes" to tell the story of how the team had pulled off the uninterrupted take.

The reasons the actors look awkward, for example, are explained – and the results are hilarious. It becomes apparent that this debut feature from indie Japanese filmmaker Shinichiro Ueda is not a horror movie at all, but a surprisingly heart-warming work that pays tribute to the art of genre film-making.

The dedication that the crew in the fictional story put into creating the movie is likely matched by that of the film-making team in real life, and one cannot help but be moved by that passion.

The entire cast of unknowns here is also utterly likeable – lead actor Hamatsu, in particular, manages to convince as both a spirited movie director and a sweet and loving father.

When was the last time one could call a zombie movie charming?



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Fans bring shows back from the brink

Social media has the power to resurrect popular television shows which have ended their run



Alison de Souza
In Los Angeles



Lucifer, starring Tom Ellis (above)

Veronica Mars, starring Kristen Bell (far left); and Sense8 (left)

Such is the power of social media that an impassioned online outcry can bring a television show back from the dead – sometimes in a matter of hours.

A prime example is the award-winning police sitcom, Brooklyn Nine-Nine (2013 to present), which airs on Diva (Singtel TV Channel 303 and StarHub TV Channel 513) on Fridays at 9pm.

Last May, the critically praised feel-good comedy was cancelled by the Fox television network in the United States because of low viewing numbers. But after a fan outpouring under the hashtag #RenewB99, it was quickly picked up by another network – all in the space of 31 hours.

Speaking to The Straits Times from the set of the show in Los Angeles last month, co-creator Dan Goor and actors Andy Samberg, Andre Braugher, Stephanie Beatriz and Joe Lo Truglio admit they were taken aback at how broad and vocal their fanbase was.

“It was shocking to me because I thought no one was watching it. Our numbers weren’t good,” says Beatriz, 37, who plays police officer Rosa Diaz.

The actors argue that the ratings system used to determine shows’ fates is no longer adequate because it ignores viewers from other countries, not to mention the fact that people watch television on various devices today.

That said, Goor, 43, notes there were reasons that the Brooklyn Nine-Nine fan campaign succeeded where others – such as the one for science-fiction drama FlashForward (2009 to 2010) – failed.

“Independent of the fan reaction, there were business realities that helped it come to fruition,” he says.

He is referring to the fact that media conglomerate NBCUniversal had always produced the show, which it sold to Fox in 2013. NBC’s television network then decided to air the sixth and current season after it was cancelled by Fox.

“The fact that it was NBCUniversal and now NBC, which is the same family, meant it was vertical integration and a lot easier for us to get picked up,” Goor explains.

Fan crusades to rescue shows



Brooklyn Nine-Nine, starring (from far left) Andy Samberg and Andre Braugher; and Timeless, starring Matt Lanter and Abigail Spencer
PHOTOS: WARNER BROS., UPN, NETFLIX, NBCUNIVERSAL, MIDDKIDD PRODUCTIONS

have been around since the 1960s, when viewers launched a letter-writing campaign so the original Star Trek series (1966 to 1969) would get a third season.

But the Internet’s power to galvanise fans is exponentially greater, also enabling them to crowdfund campaigns to finance everything from a movie version of their beloved series to a plane banner pleading for its rescue.

Last year, there were other shows with huge followings getting a new lease on life because of fans.

They came to the rescue in June 2017, when Netflix announced it was axing Sense8 (2015 to 2018).

A big-budget drama about eight mysteriously interconnected people across the globe, it was created by the Wachowskis, the siblings behind films such as The Matrix (1999).

Following a petition and a #RenewSense8 hashtag campaign, the streaming giant said it would air a two-hour finale last year “to give Sense8 fans the ending they totally deserve”.

Fans of interplanetary thriller The Expanse (2015 to present) hired a plane to fly a #SaveTheExpanse banner. A month later, Amazon Studios agreed to pick up the show after it had been cancelled by the Syfy network.

The cost of hiring that plane was nothing, however, compared with the US\$5.7 million raised by a 2013 Kickstarter campaign to finance a movie version of Veronica Mars.

Fans of the teenage-detective noir drama had been clamouring for its return since it ended its run from 2004 to 2007. They got their

wish with the Kickstarter movie, which came out in 2014, and now can also look forward to a new season that will air on the Hulu streaming platform this year.

Samberg, 40, says of Brooklyn Nine-Nine’s revival: “It was awesome that NBC heard the voice of the fans and it was moving that they spoke out so enthusiastically. A lot of things came together in a financial, emotional and creative way that made it possible.”

The star won the 2014 Golden Globe for Best Actor in a TV Comedy for his role as goofy whiz detective Jake Peralta. Brooklyn Nine-Nine won the Globe for Best TV Comedy that same year.

The show’s diversity is a factor too, Goor believes. He says: “The fact that there are two Latina leads, two African-American leads, an openly gay character and a character who just came out allows for points of entry for a much larger audience.”

It dawned on him and the cast how many fans they had only last May.

Braugher, 56, who plays Raymond Holt, the police captain in Brooklyn’s 99th precinct, experienced that on a trip to London last year. “I was amazed by how many young people in England were following the show closely and recognised me.”

“I remember feeling like I have an entirely new fanbase,” says the star, previously best known for his Emmy-winning turn on a more serious police show, drama Homicide: Life on the Street (1993 to 1999).

The decision to renew or cancel shows typically hinges on a show’s viewership. This is determined

either by the Nielsen ratings system traditionally used to measure the audience size and calculate the show’s value to advertisers or, for streaming platforms such as Netflix, private figures that are not disclosed.

Recent fan crusades suggest the true measure of a show’s support is also its cultural impact, not to mention the fact that the current ratings system does not fully capture newer viewing devices and habits or a show’s reach outside the US.

American actress Beatriz does not mince her words.

“The (Nielsen) ratings system is trash,” she says. “It’s not a valuable way any more to measure what people are watching.”

“Most of us are watching television on handheld devices and there’s a missed opportunity happening with counting that, which was so clear when we were cancelled and there was the overwhelming discussion on social media about our show.”

Lo Truglio, the 48-year-old who plays officer Charles Boyle, agrees things need to change.

The American television industry must “understand that the audience for any show isn’t just in the US any more. It’s global”.

He adds: “I think that’s one of the biggest takeaways from this.”

Fans reach out to the actors on social media, he says, from countries such as Malaysia and New Zealand.

“We didn’t realise the reach was that far. That’s a testament to the universal values of the show.”

stlife@sph.com.sg

The shows must go on

SENSE8 (2015 to 2018)

Created by the Wachowskis, the siblings behind blockbuster films such as The Matrix (1999), this ambitious, globetrotting science-fiction drama was cancelled after two seasons.

When Netflix announced this in June 2017, fans started a #RenewSense8 hashtag campaign. The streaming giant stuck to its guns on the cancellation, but at the end of that month, it said it would air a two-hour finale.

TIMELESS (2016 to 2018)

The time-travel caper was supposed to be cancelled when its first season ended in 2017, but was revived for a second one because of fans.

When the network pulled the plug after Season 2, a crowdfunding campaign and other efforts spurred the decision to make a two-hour finale last December to placate fans and tie up loose ends.

VERONICA MARS (2004 to present)

A noir drama about a teenage sleuth investigating the murder of her best friend, this cult show was cancelled in 2007 after its third season.

In 2013, star Kristen Bell and creator Rob Thomas launched a Kickstarter campaign to fund a Veronica Mars movie. They surpassed their US\$2-million goal in less than 11 hours and raised US\$5.7 million for the film, which came out in 2014.

Because of continued fan support, streaming service Hulu will air a fourth season of eight episodes this year.

LUCIFER (2015 to present) LAST MAN STANDING (2011 to present) THE EXPANSE (2015 to present)

Like Brooklyn Nine-Nine, these shows were cancelled, then brought back on other television networks or streaming platforms.

Last April, Fox pulled the plug on Lucifer, a supernatural procedural, after three seasons, but Netflix announced it would pick it up after #SaveLucifer and #PickUpLucifer trended on Twitter.

The sitcom, Last Man Standing, aired on the ABC network for six seasons from 2011 to 2017 and fans were irate over its cancellation.

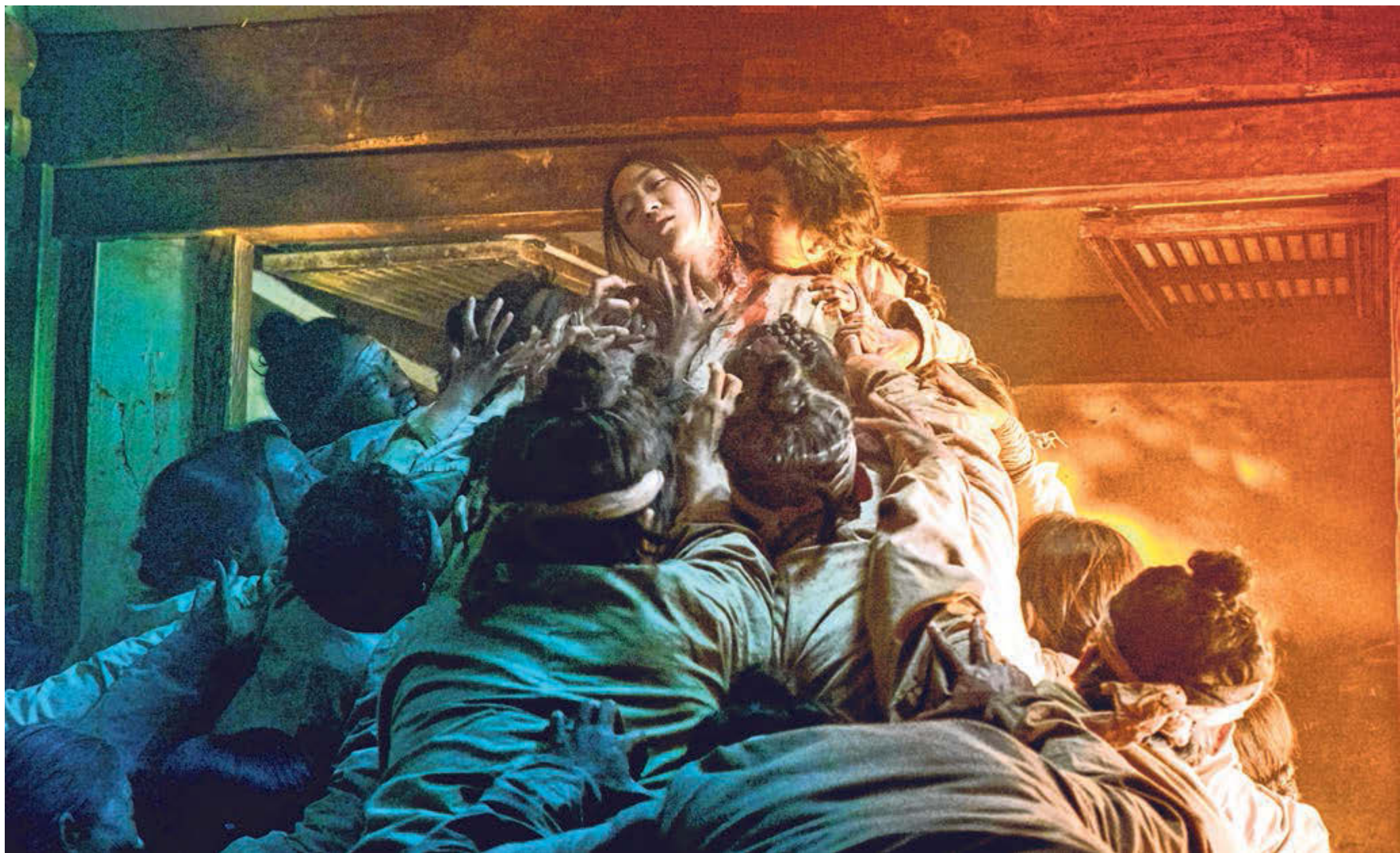
One of the many save-the-show petitions on change.org had more than 441,000 supporters. Fox decided to pick it up for a seventh season, which aired in September last year.

The Expanse, a science-fiction drama with a cult following, was cancelled in May last year after three seasons on the Syfy network.

Following a fervent fan campaign – which included the hiring of a plane to fly a #SaveTheExpanse banner – Amazon Studios said later that month it would continue the show.

Alison de Souza

• The sixth and latest season of Brooklyn Nine-Nine airs on Diva (Singtel TV Channel 303 and StarHub TV Channel 513) on Fridays at 9pm.



In Kingdom, a mysterious outbreak takes place during the Joseon dynasty and turns people into zombie-like creatures. PHOTO: NETFLIX

Zombie tale with a Korean flavour

Netflix period drama Kingdom uses the undead to draw more audiences

Yip Wai Yee
Entertainment Correspondent

The undead can be useful after all. Zombies are a good way to make a Korean period drama such as Kingdom more accessible to international audiences, says lead actor Ju Ji-hoon.

Speaking to The Straits Times and other regional media in Korean via an interpreter, the 36-year-old

heart-throb says: "Korean audiences are familiar with Korean period dramas, but this may not be so for other audiences.

"As we know, zombie stories are loved across the world. Kingdom is a universal zombie story with a Korean flavour."

Kingdom, a six-episode series which premieres on Netflix tomorrow, is a zombie horror story set in Korea's Joseon dynasty (1392 to 1897). Even before the show

premieres, Netflix has renewed it for a second season.

In it, Ju plays the crown prince, who is accused of betraying his king father.

When a mysterious outbreak occurs in the kingdom, turning people into zombie-like creatures, he sets out to stop it.

Ju was in Singapore last November to promote the show alongside his co-star, Ryu Seung-ryong, who plays a corrupt politician.

They were fielding interviews at Netflix's See What's Next: Asia event at Marina Bay Sands, where the American streaming-service giant was promoting a slate of its upcoming titles to more than 300 journalists.

Ju says: "I did not feel any pressure while shooting this series, but I'm starting to feel a bit of pressure now that I'm in Singapore and seeing how much interest there is."

"Hopefully, the show, which showcases beautiful Korean costumes and traditional Korean culture, will push international audiences to watch more Korean shows."

Ryu, 48, a veteran actor of hit films such as Miracle In Cell No. 7 (2013) and Masquerade (2012), adds: "We got to fly here on business class and we're staying in fancy suites here. I'm starting to feel like this show will be a big deal."

As with most zombie films and television shows, Kingdom features gore and scares – elements that neither actor is a fan of.

Ju says: "I can't watch horror shows. I get scared and can't sleep."

However, the scariest thing on set had nothing to do with the undead. He says: "It's the filming schedule."

Ryu adds with a chuckle: "It's when we have finished filming an entire scene, but the director wants a retake."

"I think that is the scariest moment."

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• Kingdom premieres on Netflix tomorrow.

Making sex scenes look natural in the #MeToo era

SYDNEY • In the soft afternoon light, men and women huddle in groups, their images reflected in floor-to-ceiling mirrors. Some kiss. Some fondle one another. Some touch fingertips, tension sizzling.

The men and women are actors. They are taking part in an "intimacy workshop" – part of a growing trend to carve out safe spaces in the theatre and film industries.

At the helm is Ms Ita O'Brien, a London-based "intimacy coordinator". A former dancer and director, she – along with other intimacy coordinators and specialised stunt people – is emerging as a powerful influence in an industry grappling with the fallout of #MeToo.

Ms O'Brien, 53, has worked for the likes of cable network HBO and streaming service Netflix.

Her approach, increasingly in demand globally, has found particular resonance in Australia, where a laddish culture persists in a world of theatre and film that tends to be insular and has recently come under fire for protecting the status quo.

Accusations of sexual misconduct like those against Oscar-winning actor Geoffrey Rush – first by actress Eryn Jean Norvill, who accused him of deliberately stroking her breast during a 2015-2016 production of King Lear and, later, by the Orange Is The New Black star Yael Stone – have rocked the industry in Australia.

Yet, the #MeToo movement has been slow to take off, largely because the country's defamation laws heavily favour the accused.

Ms O'Brien said the global entertainment industry should have a code of conduct so that performers can operate in the workplace "without fear" – a need illustrated by



Actors Erica Lovell and Ross Walker during an exercise in a workshop led by "intimacy coordinator" Ita O'Brien in Sydney, Australia. PHOTO: NYTIMES

several cases that made headlines in recent years.

The 2013 film, Blue Is The Warmest Colour, was applauded for its raw and exposing depictions of lesbian sex.

But one of its main stars, French actress Lea Seydoux, later described the filming as "humiliating" and said it had made her feel "like a prostitute".

Three years later, with the #MeToo movement prompting a reconsideration of previously accepted norms, an infamous rape scene in the 1972 film, Last Tango In Paris, was condemned as akin to sexual abuse.

The scene had been sprung without prior warning upon 19-year-old actress Maria Schneider, who later said that during the scene she had felt "raped".

To avoid any compromising situations – and help productions safe-

guard against litigation or accusations of inappropriate behaviour, Ms O'Brien has created a series of Intimacy On Set guidelines for directors, producers and actors.

Shelley Casey, 31, a Sydney-based actress who attended her workshop in Sydney last November, described the atmosphere in Australia's film and theatre worlds as "just get on with it – don't cause a fuss".

Recalling rehearsals in which she was made to perform intimate moments as other production members chanted and whooped, she compared the expectation to improvise sex scenes to an era when fight scenes were also improvised – leading to unsafe rehearsals.

"Imagine the days when they put a sword in your hand and said, 'Just wing this fight scene,'" she said, whereas the Intimacy On Set guidelines give "everyone the rules, the

boundaries, the language, the communication".

Stemming abuse is not the only issue. Many at the workshop – where participants mimicked the mating rhythms of horses and gorillas in a bid to loosen up – said using standardised guidelines also lessened the awkwardness of sex scenes.

Last year, Ms O'Brien worked on the British set of the Netflix comedy, Sex Education, which follows the trials of a teenage virgin. The series was released this month.

The show's director, Ben Taylor, said it was this "initial breaking down of taboos" that was most valuable, as well as the open discussion of sex scenes.

"Our shoot was far better for us, having met Ita," he said. "I think she is about to become busy."

He noted that Ms O'Brien had created a critical space to discuss fears and anxieties with a young, often inexperienced, cast.

He stressed the focus was not just on physical safety, but also on ensuring that the sex scenes appeared authentic.

A long-standing criticism of over-rehearsing sex scenes has been that it will lead to a loss of chemistry.

Bernardo Bertolucci, who directed Last Tango In Paris, once defended the film's rape scene by arguing that he had wanted Schneider "to feel, not to act, the rage and humiliation". The director died in November last year.

Ms O'Brien argues that her guidelines help create magnetism among actors rather than squelching it.

Her programme aims to keep the actors "personally safe so they can be artistically free", she said.

"It doesn't lock down or censor. It frees up the actor." NYTIMES

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Crashing into sexism, harassment

The latest season of the comedy-drama series tackles hot-button issues head-on



In the new season of *Crashing*, Pete Holmes' struggling-comedian character has to contend with the fact that straight white men no longer corner the stand-up comedy market. PHOTO: HBO

Alison de Souza
In New York

It is taboo for American comedians to call one another out for offensive jokes or misconduct.

The #MeToo era and scandals involving big names such as Bill Cosby, Louis C.K., Aziz Ansari and Kevin Hart have put pressure on other comics to publicly denounce them – yet Judd Apatow and Pete Holmes are among the few who have done so.

They have spoken out both personally and through *Crashing* (2017 to now), the comedy-drama series they co-write and produce.

Season 3, which airs in Singapore on Mondays on HBO (StarHub TV Channel 601), HBO Go and HBO On Demand (StarHub TV Channel 602), continues the show's behind-the-scenes look at the world of stand-up comedy.

Holmes plays a version of himself, but this season also tackles hot-button topics such as the sex-

ism and harassment faced by female comics, and how straight white male comedians are starting to see their dominance fade.

Speaking to The Straits Times in New York recently, Apatow and Holmes acknowledge most comics' reluctance to criticise their peers.

Apatow – a top television comedy producer (*Girls*, 2012 to 2017), filmmaker (*Knocked Up*, 2007) and a stand-up himself – was one of the few male comedians to slam a December performance by C.K., who has been performing again since admitting, in late 2017, to having sexually harassed women he worked with.

In his set, C.K. had made fun of teenage survivors of the Parkland, Florida school shooting in February last year, as well as gender non-binary youths.

Apatow, who tweeted that C.K.'s jokes were "hacky, unfunny and shallow", says: "Comics don't like it – they get mad if you call out another comedian. They say, 'He's still working on (the joke) – maybe he's going to fix it the next day.'"

"But as soon as you're on a public stage, it's out there," says the 51-year-old. "And I think (C.K.) needs to hear when his material is terrible."

He adds: "No one says don't perform. But trans people kill themselves and get murdered every day – do you really have to give them a hard time right now?"

Many comics fear the fallout from speaking publicly on such issues, Apatow notes.

"There's a lot of clickbait in these conversations, so a lot of people don't want to talk because everyone feels like their careers are going to end if they say anything."

"Louis won't speak for himself – he won't speak (about his misconduct) in public or in his act – so it's like he's foisted these questions on everyone else. And it could hurt us if we misspeak, but if you don't have an opinion, you get in trouble. So people are exhausted."

With *Crashing*, there was an opportunity to tackle broader issues to do with sexism and harassment.

Holmes, its creator and star says: "The sort of stuff that we deal with has been happening in comedy clubs and I think is still happening even though people know the climate is shifting. So it was important to talk about it."

The 39-year-old, whose brand of comedy tends to be "clean", has never been a fan of sexist and other offensive jokes, he says.

"When I was coming up in the scene, I was uncomfortable with a lot of comedy I was seeing."

"I'm not saying people shouldn't have the right to do it, but there's a bullying feel to it. And even though I'm a straight white man, I still felt the toxicity of that when I was 28 and in a club and was still religious and very sweet."

He is not too worried about blowback from other comics because of the stance the show takes.

"There's some growing pains involved when any group is evolving, and I'd like to think the majority of us are reading the cues and trying to grow along with them."

In one episode, the woman who

runs an influential comedy club tells Holmes' character, Pete, that she has had enough of "white guys talking about nothing" on stage.

This reflects new attitudes on the scene now that straight white male comics are less dominant, Holmes says.

"You see more international and more non-male or non-white stand-ups and the same goes for writers and artists for all types."

"And there's no plea for sympathy – we're not trying to be, like, 'Look at poor Pete, he's a little late to the game.'"

"It's just a look at how we're evolving and how is Pete going to become interesting enough to contend not just with other straight white male comedians but with everybody."

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● *Crashing* airs on Mondays at 11am and 11pm on HBO (StarHub TV Channel 601), HBO Go and HBO On Demand (StarHub TV Channel 602).

ScreenTest

Dot.com crash and world of stand-up comedy revealed



Alison de Souza

There are good reasons the unlovely term "edutainment" never caught on – one of them being the instant turnoff many feel when they sense a piece of entertainment is trying to teach them something.

So *Valley Of The Boom*, the National Geographic channel's mash-up between a scripted series and documentary, has its work cut out for it.

It is an origin story of the Internet which revisits the gold rush of Silicon Valley's 1990s dot.com boom and bust – those heady days when no one quite knew what the Net was, investors threw grotesque sums of money at it, and start-ups threw US\$100,000 parties before earning a cent.

This is told through the story of three companies: Netscape, whose David-and-Goliath clash with Microsoft's Internet Explorer ignited the first browser wars; TheGlobe.com, a pioneer in social networking; and Pixelon, a streaming-video business that conned investors and embodied many of the era's excesses.

Like National Geographic's other hybrid docudrama, the space-themed *Mars*, the drama portion here suffers from being constantly interrupted by the documentary bits.

The latter consists of talking-head interviews with

experts and key players from that time, including Mr James Barksdale, who was chief executive officer of the company that developed Netscape. He provides commentary, but is also portrayed by The West Wing star Bradley Whitford.

The story of Pixelon founder and conman Michael Fenne (Steve Zahn) is the weak link in the scripted section. Although a larger-than-life figure by all accounts, Zahn plays him like a cartoon.

Creator Matthew Carnahan brings some of the same frenetic pop sensibilities and snarky humour that made his corporate drama *House Of Lies* (2012 to 2016) so watchable.

But he appears unfocused here. The eye does not know where to settle as the narrative darts from one place to another. Adding to the chaos: Actors breaking character and addressing the audience directly, along with dance sequences and rap performances used as exposition.

It is a sprawling mess saved only by sporadic moments of humour and insight and the fact that this was a genuinely fascinating period for technology and society as a whole – one that foreshadowed current epiphanies about the Net's unforeseen harmful effects and the power of the companies that control it.

The comedy-drama *Crashing* also veers in a didactic direction this season, but does so with more finesse.

It is still a fly-on-the-wall look at the world of stand-up comedy through the eyes of struggling comic Pete Holmes, with Holmes playing a version of himself.



But the focus steers away from Pete to address issues the comedy world can no longer ignore in the wake of various scandals involving disgraced comics such as Louis C.K. It also references how comedians who make offensive jokes are now losing work, as Kevin Hart did with the Oscars ceremony when old homophobic tweets of his resurfaced.

The series devotes an episode to Pete's comedian ex-girlfriend Ali (Jamie Lee), who is harassed by a boorish male comic and generally condescended to. It also tackles other issues related to sexism – for instance, consent in sexual encounters – and rips apart the standard dismissals of those concerns.

All this is done with a comedic

touch but even so, it occasionally feels heavy-handed.

Yet the show undermines its new "wokeness" by introducing a female character, Pete's new too-good-to-be-true girlfriend, who exists mostly to support his storyline and personal development.

More interesting are the scenes where Pete is rejected by the gatekeeper at a legendary comedy club, who says she has enough "white guys talking about nothing".

He then has to swallow the fact that younger comic Jaboukie (played by Jaboukie Young-White) – who is gay and a man of colour – is doing better than him.

It is a revealing look inside an arcane milieu – one that often serves as a proxy for wider cultural shifts.



Left: Steve Zahn (centre) plays the founder of a Silicon Valley start-up in *Valley Of The Boom*.

Above: Jamie Lee plays Ali, a comedienne who is harassed by a male comic, in *Crashing*. PHOTOS: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, HBO

VIEWIT / VALLEY OF THE BOOM

Sundays at 10pm on National Geographic (Singtel TV Channel 201 and StarHub TV Channel 411, also streaming on Fox+)

CRASHING

Mondays at 11am and 11pm on HBO (StarHub TV Channel 601), HBO Go and HBO On Demand (StarHub TV Channel 602)

★★★☆☆



American band Deerhunter's eighth album *Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?* heralds the end of times. PHOTO: 4AD

Gloomy lyrics with cheery tunes

American indie band Deerhunter addresses the disconnect brought about by technology with upbeat melodies



INDIE ROCK/PSYCHEDELIC ROCK
WHY HASN'T EVERYTHING ALREADY DISAPPEARED?
Deerhunter
4AD
★★★★☆

Eddino Abdul Hadi

Rarely has an album heralding the end of times sounded so upbeat and melodic, but with their eighth album, American indie rock stalwarts Deerhunter have created just that.

The general disconnect brought about by technology and modern anxieties arising from social and political issues are tackled by this 18-year-old Atlanta quintet through a layered mix of warm, dulcet rock and spacey, sci-fi sounds.

The songs in *Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?* are concise and the album clocks in at only slightly more than 36 minutes. Yet it lingers like the beauty of dusk, when light slowly gives way to darkness.

In album opener *Death In Midsummer*, singer and songwriter Bradford Cox's familiar voice sings a lilting melody over a harpsichord

intro as he croons about "poisoned hills" and workers who "worked their lives away" only to fade away, his voice getting increasingly strained as the song progresses.

Element, described by Cox as an "elegy for ecology", has an offbeat bassline and rhythm to inspire awkward dancing as he muses about "orange clouds" that "fade up for a toxic view" and the fury of "fire, wind, water".

The band's past avant-garde tendencies seep through in the instrumental *Greenpoint Gothic* and its gamelan-like sounds, making it a tune that is childlike and eerie at the same time, as well as in the robotic-voiced, sci-fi interlude in the middle of the album, *Detournement* ("we can contact the higher spirits from our electronic brains").

What Happens To People? is marked by shifting time signatures and cascading notes as Cox's fragile voice tackles despair ("They quit holding on/What happens to peo-

ple?/Their dreams turn to dark").

No One's Sleeping, written about the 2015 murder of British politician Jo Cox by a mentally ill man who held neo-Nazi views, should be gloomy and depressing. Instead, there is an almost euphoric quality to the song and its kaleidoscopic outro. "There's much duress/Violence has taken hold," Cox sings in the first verse.

He offers an escape later on in the same song, leading the listener "to golden pond/There is peace/The great beyond".

It is a concept he explores again in *Tarnung*, named after the German word for "camouflage". Cox and Welsh singer Cate Le Bon, who is also one of the album's producers, blend their voices together, giving the song an ethereal, choir-like feel while they sing of "avenues with rain / The place to fade away / Phase into gold light".

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James Blake comes to terms with inner demons



ELECTRONIC/INDIE
ASSUME FORM
James Blake
Polydor
★★★★☆

Yeow Kai Chai

In May last year, English musician James Blake posted a note on his Twitter page, critiquing the label "sad boy" often used on his music or any man who expressed male vulnerability or emotional complexity.

"I've always found that expression unhealthy and problematic when used to describe men just openly talking about their feelings," he said, becoming a de facto advocate on questioning the social stigmatisation of mental health issues.

That post accompanied the release of the single *Don't Miss It*, which is the penultimate song on his fourth album, *Assume Form*.

The song is a piano dirge, stripped down yet altered ever so slightly that you feel the unease as his voice keens: "When you stop being a ghost in a shell/And everybody keeps saying you look well."

It's "a classic combination of depression and anxiety" brought on by life on the road and *Assume Form* represents a reckoning of sorts, a coming to terms with his inner demons and the process which leads to reconciliation.

It is also a love letter to his partner, Jameela Jamil, the actress from the TV series *The Good Place*, who has provided solace and stability for Blake.

The opener and title track is a gorgeously sparse ballad, at first a smattering of romantic ivories, before it gives way to mournful synths and clattering, as if he is indeed slowly materialising and laying down anchor. "I will assume form, I'll leave the ether/I will assume form, I'll be out of my head this time," he promises.

Getting out of his head also means reaching out to collaborators.

In *Mile High*, Blake alternates vocal duties with rapper Travis Scott, accompanied by a woozy riff care of producer Metro Boomin.

The song mimics airborne circularity, the machinery of fame and success which feeds on itself. "We just be mile high clubbin'/I'm on a thousand miles runnin'," Scott drawls, to which Blake reminds: "Don't wanna see me by yourself."

This is followed by *Tell Them*, a treatise on a one-night stand and the concomitant fear of intimacy and commitment.

Singer-songwriter Moses Sumney and Blake play both sides of one's conscience over handclaps and stuttering beats: The former wheezes about how "a fact betrays the way you feel", while the latter drones, "I didn't plan to stay long."

You can hear Blake venturing into brighter climes. He opens up in the moving ballad *Into The Red*, where he sings clearly: "She's no traitor/I've got no chaser.../For a joint account/She gave me everything that she had left."

The music opens with strings, then moves on to a loop of curious, micro piano plinks. He is learning to trust and you can almost hear him realising he does not need to hide anymore.

There are two unadulterated love songs which prove Blake is comfortable in his skin. Co-produced by Oneohtrix Point Never and built upon a sample from the R&B group The Manhattans, *Can't Believe The Way We Flow* is Blake completely at peace, feeling higher than high.

The swooning pop doozy *I'll Come Too* continues the doo-wop romancing. He has found his *La La Land*, at last.

A tribute to Nat King Cole



JAZZ
ONE NIGHT ONLY: LIVE AT THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL
Gregory Porter
Golden Slipper Publishing
★★★★☆

Ong Sor Fern

Fans of Gregory Porter will want to pick up this album, which captures the American singer in fine form. His first live album was recorded at one of three performances at the storied London venue last April.

Packed with 19 tracks, the 79-minute programme focuses mainly on the songs made famous by Nat King Cole. Porter is an avowed fan of the crooner and recorded a tribute album, *Nat King Cole & Me*, in 2017.

His rugged baritone is very different in texture from Cole's sinewy tenor. His love of blues and more pop-oriented stylings is evident in his original hits like *When Love Was King* and *No Love Dying*, which combine a 1960s activist/folksong vibe with bluesy belting.

But Porter's affably relaxed delivery also takes a page from Cole's famously featherlight touch with a lyric. You can hear it on tracks like *L-O-V-E* and *Sweet Lorraine*, both of which benefit from pianist Chip Crawford's perky accompaniment.

If there is a quibble, it is that the 70-strong London Studio Orchestra, led by arranger Vince Mendoza, can sometimes sound a bit too blowsy on standards that are more suited to small intimate ensemble setups.

Still, a Royal Albert Hall gig needs some blockbuster element and the orchestra fits the bill.

MusicCharts

APPLE MUSIC

- (-) 7 Rings – Ariana Grande
- (1) Thank U, Next – Ariana Grande
- (4) Sunflower (Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse) – Post Malone and Swae Lee
- (5) Without Me – Halsey
- (2) Everything I Need – Skylar Grey
- (6) Solo – Jennie
- (3) A Kind Of Sorrow – A-lin
- (7) Sweet But Psycho – Ava Max
- (-) Dancing With A Stranger – Sam Smith and Normani
- (9) Happier – Marshmello & Bastille

• For the week of Jan 23 in Singapore

SPOTIFY SINGAPORE

- (-) 7 Rings – Ariana Grande
- (1) Sunflower (Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse) – Post Malone and Swae Lee
- (2) Thank U, Next – Ariana Grande
- (4) Without Me – Halsey
- (10) Dancing With A Stranger – Sam Smith and Normani
- (3) A Kind Of Sorrow – A-lin
- (7) Way Back Home – Shaun, Conor Maynard and Sam Feldt
- (6) Sweet But Psycho – Ava Max
- (5) Solo – Jennie
- (9) Saturday Nights – Khalid

• For the week ending Jan 23

HIT FM

- (1) Ugly Beauty – Jolin Tsai
- (8) Resurgence – JJ Lin
- (12) An Addiction To Staying Up Late – Don Chu
- (15) Queen Bee – Lady Bees
- (5) The Time Keeper – Fuying and Sam
- (7) Forever Young – Eve Ai
- (6) Is It Okay To Like You – Van Ness Wu
- (13) Talent – Joker Xue
- (2) The Will – Tanya Chua
- (-) Fake Monk – Khalil Fong

• For the week ending Jan 13

• Information from Billboard not available as at press time.

Streaming services face new tests over artists' misconduct

A rape complaint against singer Chris Brown threatens to put streaming services under fresh scrutiny in their response to the behaviour of musicians they stream

NEW YORK • To play or not to play? Spotify and other music-streaming services, which have struggled with how to cope with allegations of misconduct by artists, are facing a new test.

Singer Chris Brown was detained on Monday in Paris after a woman filed a rape complaint, renewing legal trouble for an artist who pleaded guilty to felony assault of then-girlfriend Rihanna in 2009.

Brown was held on potential charges of aggravated rape and drug infractions, a French judicial official had told the media.

However, he has since been released and does not have to face charges.

The incident threatens to put the streaming services under fresh scrutiny – especially after the polarising downfall of R. Kelly, who has faced allegations of sexual misconduct for years.

Spotify attempted to penalise artists' misbehaviour in a policy adopted last year, stripping Kelly and rapper XXXTentacion from its playlists. But the company had to walk back the policy after a few weeks when artists such as rapper Kendrick Lamar threatened to boycott the service.

Following the decline of CDs and terrestrial radio, music-streaming services such as Spotify, Apple Music and Pandora have become a key link between artists and listeners.

That has added pressure on the companies to respond to the behaviour of musicians they stream.

Pandora said it had been refining its policies for artists with a track record of offensive content or unacceptable behaviour.

"We approach each situation on a

case-by-case basis to ensure we stay true to our principles, avoid unnecessary censorship and provide a safe experience for our listeners," spokesman Dayle Dempsey said.

Under Spotify's short-lived rules last year, the offending acts were pulled from its playlists, but listeners could still seek them out on the service.

The policy did not specify which behaviour it considered problematic and Spotify did not communicate its plans with the music industry in advance.

Some people mistakenly believed that the artists were not available on the service in any form.

"While we believe our intentions were good, the language was too vague, we created confusion and concern, and didn't spend enough time getting input from our own team and key partners before sharing new guidelines," the company said in a blog post at the time.

XXXTentacion, a rapper accused of assaulting a pregnant woman, was restored to the service in June.

He was murdered later that month in an apparent robbery.

But Kelly remains banned from Spotify's playlists. He has been accused of coercing women into having sex when they were underage.

Parents also have alleged that the R&B singer held their daughters against the women's will.

A recent documentary series, called *Surviving R. Kelly*, renewed concerns about the artist with its accounts from his alleged victims.

In the wake of the outcry, Sony's RCA scrubbed Kelly from its lineup last week. The music label also represents Brown.

The furor also led Lady Gaga, whose 2013 single *Do What U Want* features Kelly, to distance herself from the singer and apologised for her poor judgment over working with him. "I intend to remove this song off iTunes and other streaming platforms and will not be working with him again," she posted online. BLOOMBERG

ERYKAH BADU BOOED FOR SUPPORTING R. KELLY on D10



ARTISTS IN TROUBLE: Rapper Chris Brown (left) was detained on Monday in Paris after a woman filed a rape complaint. He has since been released. Singer R. Kelly (above), who has been accused of coercing women into having sex when they were underage, is banned from Spotify's playlists.

PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

Owners of World's Best Restaurant to open eatery in London

NEW YORK • The owners of Eleven Madison Park, the New York eatery that was named World's Best Restaurant in 2017, plan to open their first European outpost at the luxury Claridge's hotel in London.

The new establishment will be called Davies And Brook, marking the hotel's location on the corner of Davies and Brook streets, in Mayfair. It is scheduled to open this summer, chef Daniel Humm and business partner Will Guidara said in a telephone interview.

Davies And Brook will be a gourmet restaurant, in the smart casual style of Eleven Madison Park.

What it will not have are the lengthy New York tasting menus, which can cost more than US\$300 (S\$408).

Humm is creating new dishes for London and the current plan is to offer two savoury courses for lunch and three for dinner. No decision has yet been taken on the prices.

"We are not opening Eleven Madison Park in London," he said.

"It is a different restaurant, a different format, but with the same philosophy. It is going to be of the same family as Eleven Madison Park.

"For Claridge's, we want to be sure the food really fits. Claridge's has something very classic about it and my food has always been a little classic.

"There are certain products that are really great in Britain, like game, which isn't really celebrated in America the way it is in Europe," he added. "We are excited about certain fish, the cheese and the dairy."

"But if a guest feels a hint of Eleven Madison Park, a nod to it, that is who we are."

In New York, Humm's most famous creations include a vegetar-



Chef Daniel Humm (far left) and business partner Will Guidara, who run Eleven Madison Park, the New York eatery that was named World's Best Restaurant in 2017, will open Davies And Brook at the Claridge's hotel in London.

PHOTO: ASIAs 50 BEST RESTAURANTS

ian version of steak tartare, served tableside using a carrot in place of the meat.

The new restaurant replaces Fera, which British chef Simon Rogan opened in 2014 and which closed on Dec 31.

Humm and Mr Guidara's group, Make It Nice, will create an entirely new look with American architect Brad Cloepfil of Portland, Oregon-based Allied Works. There will be a bar where guests can dine, along with a new kitchen and dining room and also, possibly, a terrace.

Make It Nice establishments include the more casual New York restaurant and bar NoMad, which has outposts in Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

"We are just trying to create the best possible restaurant that we can for London that will fit within Claridge's," Mr Guidara said. "We want to create a restaurant that, while we are part of the hotel, is also an amenity to the city."

The executive chef in London will

be Dmitri Magi, formerly chef de cuisine at Eleven Madison Park.

Humm, who was born in Switzerland and moved to the United States in 2003, said he was particularly excited about the new restaurant for two reasons.

"When I was 15 years old, I cooked at Claridge's very early in my career," he added. "At that time, I was intimidated by Claridge's, just walking by and seeing all the fancy cars outside. I would never have set foot in there. I was using the staff entrance and working downstairs."

"The other reason is that while I love being in America – it has been very good for us – at heart I am European. And spending time in Europe is important for me."

Humm is not the first New York chef to open in London in recent years.

Daniel Boulud opened Bar Boulud at the Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park in 2010 while Jean-Georges Vongerichten set up Jean-Georges at the Connaught in 2017. BLOOMBERG

Love in 200 words

This Valentine's Day, The Straits Times invites you to tell us a love story in miniature

Send us a story about love – true, imagined, funny, sad, yours, anybody's – in 200 words, 200 being the magic number this Bicentennial year. We will publish the best entries on Feb 10.

- All entries must be 200 words or fewer.
- The Straits Times reserves the right to curate, edit and publish the entries at its discretion.
- Entries should not contain profanity or graphic language.

Send your entry to stlife@sph.com.sg by Jan 31 with "LOVE STORY" in the e-mail subject line, along with the following details:

- Your full name as in your NRIC
- Your date of birth
- Your mobile phone number
- Your e-mail address

Brand Your Assets

Call 6289 8822 or e-mail notices@sph.com.sg to publicise your Financial Statements

NOTICES

Comics

BABY BLUES



GARFIELD



Free to air

CHANNEL 5

AM
6.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 15 (HD) (V)
6.45 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (HD) (V)
7.00 First Look Asia (Simulcast From CNA) (CA)
9.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (HD) (PG) (IE)
10.00 The \$100,000 Pyramid (HD) (PG) (V)
10.30 Everyday Gourmet 3 (HD) (IE)
11.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
PM
12.00 Martha Bakes 6 (IE)
12.30 Secret Meat Business (IE)
1.00 Wheel Of Fortune 36 (HD) (CC) (V)
1.30 Kin (PG) (CC) (D)
2.00 Phua Chu Kang Pte Ltd 4 (SC)
2.30 On the Red Dot – Old Enough! (HD) (CC) (CA)
3.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (IE)
4.00 Make You Laugh Out Loud 3 (PG) (V)
4.30 Survivor 36 (PG) (V)
5.30 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (V)
6.30 The \$100,000 Pyramid (HD) (PG) (V)
7.00 Wheel Of Fortune 36 (CC) (V)
7.30 America's Got Talent: The Champions (V)
8.30 Kin (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 News 5
9.30 Talking Point 2018 (HD) (CA)
10.00 The Resident (PG13) (CC) (D)
11.00 NCIS 14 (HD) (PG13) (D)
AM
12.00 Kin (PG) (CC) (D)
12.30 Code Of Law 4 (PG13) (D)
1.30 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)
2.20 Hawaii Five-0 7 (PG13) (D)
3.10 Grimm 5 (HD) (PG13) (D)
4.10 Martha Bakes 6 (IE)
4.40 Secret Meat Business (IE)
5.10 The Dr Oz Show 10 (HD) (IE)

CHANNEL 8

AM
6.00 Golden Age Talentime (V)
7.00 Sidewalk Scientist (IE)
7.30 Hello Singapore Highlights (CA)
8.00 Heart To Heart (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 Morning Express (CA)
9.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)
10.00 Fruit, Veggies & Me 2 (CC) (IE)
10.30 Night Market Life A.k.a. Life (PG) (D)
PM
12.30 JML Home Shopping (Infomercial)

1.00 News 8 At One
1.30 118 (PG) (CC) (D)
2.00 Little Counsellor (HD)
2.30 The Precedent (PG) (D)
3.30 Golden Melody (V)
4.30 Taste Of Life (PG) (D)
5.30 118 Reunion (PG) (CC) (D)
6.30 Hello Singapore (CA)
7.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Top 10 Singapore (CC) (IE)
9.00 Heart To Heart (PG) (CC) (D)
10.00 News Tonight
10.30 Focus (CC) (CA)
11.00 Princess Agents (PG) (D)
AM
12.00 The Princess Weiyong (PG) (D)
1.00 Chef Apprentice (V)
2.00 A Time To Dance (D)
4.00 A Place Called Home (PG) (D)

CHANNEL U

AM
11.00 Home Shopping (Infomercial)
PM
3.00 Unique Lodging (CC) (IE)
4.00 The Food Detectives (IE)
4.30 The Work Goes On (IE)
5.00 Cheongdamdong Scandal (PG) (CC) (D)
6.00 The Menu (PG) (CC) (D)
7.00 My Father Is Strange (PG) (CC) (D)
9.00 World Food (CC) (IE)
10.00 Brother's Keeper 2 (PG) (CC) (D)
11.00 News Tonight
11.30 World Food (CC) (IE)
AM
12.30 My Father Is Strange (PG) (CC) (D)
2.30 Close

CNA

AM
6.00 Singapore Tonight
7.00 First Look Asia
9.00 Asia Business First
10.00 Headline News
10.02 Real Deal
11.00 News Now
PM
1.00 Headline News
1.02 Champions For Change
2.00 News Now
4.00 Headline News
4.02 Real Deal
5.00 News Now
7.00 Headline News

7.02 Champions For Change (CC)
8.00 Primetime Asia
9.00 Headline News
9.02 Insight (CC)
10.00 Singapore Tonight
11.00 Headline News
11.02 Champions For Change
AM
12.00 News Now
12.30 Power List Asia 6
1.00 Headline News
1.02 Insight
2.00 News Now
2.30 The Successors 6
3.00 Headline News
3.02 Real Deal
4.00 News Now
4.30 Millionaire Minds 2
5.00 Headline News
5.02 Insight

VASANTHAM

PM
3.00 Super Samayal 4 (IE)
3.30 Aasai Aasaiya – Cooking For Love (IE)
4.00 Sundaram Kudumbathinar (HD) (D)
4.30 Thedal – Star Search 2016 (HD) (V)
5.30 Motu Patlu 3 (C)
6.00 Ishq Ka Rang Safed (PG) (D) (Hindi)
7.00 Konjam Soru Konjam 2 (Cul)
7.30 Mella Thiranthathu Kathavu 3 (PG) (CC) (D)
8.00 Uyire (PG) (CC) (D)
8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)
9.00 Kanavu Meipada 2 (CC) (IE)
10.00 Rowthiram (PG 13) (CC) (D)
10.30 Nijangal (CC) (D)
11.00 Nyabagam Varuthae 3 (V)
11.30 Ethiroli 15 (CC)
AM
12.00 Tamil Seithi (News)
12.30 Close

OKTO

AM
9.00 Twirlywoos (P)
9.30 Teddies 2 (P)
10.00 Doki 2 (P)
11.00 Sesame Street 47 (P)
11.30 Andy's Prehistoric Adventures (P)
PM
12.00 Hiccup & Sneeze (P)
12.30 Teddies 2 (P)

1.00 Coconut The Little Dragon (P)
1.30 Twirlywoos (P)
2.00 Doki 2 (P)
2.30 Sesame Street 47 (P)
3.00 Peppa Pig 6 (P)
3.30 Andy's Prehistoric Adventures (P)
4.00 Odd Squad (C)
4.30 Captain Flinn And The Pirate Dinosaurs (C)
5.00 Littlest Pet Shop (C)
5.30 Marcus Level (C)
6.00 The Lion Guard 2 (C)
6.30 Fableicious (HD) (C)
7.00 My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic 5 (HD) (C)
7.30 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (HD) (CC) (C)
8.00 Turning Mecard (C)
8.30 Inazuma Eleven (CC) (C)
9.00 ATP 250: Stockholm Open 2018 (Sports)
11.10 American Ninja Warrior 6 (HD) (PG) (Sports)
AM
12.00 Close

SURIA

PM
3.00 Juxbox Ekspres
4.00 Seindah Takdir Cinta (PG) (D)
5.00 Hilang Kasih Di Sarajevo (CC) (PG) (D) (R)
6.00 Kisah Kita (CC) (C)
6.30 Siapa Master? (CC) (IE)
7.00 Makmum Yang Paling Aku Cinta (CC) (PG) (D)
8.00 Berita (News)
8.30 Bangkit (CC) (PG) (IE)
9.30 Ti Amo, Sweetheart 100 Hari! (PG) (CC) (D)
10.30 Instageram (PG) (CC) (D)
11.30 Berita (HD) (News) (R)
AM
12.00 Close

C: Children; CA: Current Affairs;
CC: Closed Captions; Cul: Culture;
D: Drama; IE: Info-Ed; M: Movies;
P: Preschool; PG: Parental Guidance;
R: Repeat; S: Schoolkids; SC: Sitcom;
V: Variety

Programme schedules correct at time of printing. Telecast details from Mediacorp, StarHub and Singtel TV. For pay TV updates, go to www.starhub.com/tv or www.singtelv.com.sg

TheStarsSay

Aries (March 21 - April 19)
Someone is causing problems and you need to figure out what to do about the situation.

Taurus (April 20 - May 20)
Your social energy is swinging and you should be able to pick up a new activity.

Gemini (May 21 - June 20)
Your energy is better expended on clearing out old business than starting anything new.

Cancer (June 21 - July 22)
It is easier than usual to speak your mind – the words come more naturally than usual.

Leo (July 23 - Aug 22)
It is time to look over your expenses – and your revenue, for that matter.

Virgo (Aug 23 - Sept 22)
You are recognised for an achievement. It might be a one-time event or something bigger.

Libra (Sept 23 - Oct 22)
Details are getting away and you might need to call in reinforcements soon.

Scorpio (Oct 23 - Nov 21)
Your social bonds are stronger than ever, so you should be able to fall back on your friends.

Sagittarius (Nov 22 - Dec 21)
A slow, even pace is best for you, even if it does not feel right.

Capricorn (Dec 22 - Jan 19)
Try a little research – you can make great progress if you push your brain harder.

Aquarius (Jan 20 - Feb 18)
You feel better about your emotional state – things seem to make more sense.

Pisces (Feb 19 - March 20)
Work on your biggest project – your energy is more efficient than usual.

• Provided by Astrology.com (www.astrology.com)

Radio

KISS92

AM
6.00 Maddy, Jason & Arnold In The Morning
10.00 Carol Smith
PM
1.00 Charmaine Yee
4.00 Shan Wee
8.00 Josh's Goodnight Kiss

ONE FM 91.3

AM
6.00 ONE FM's #1 Breakfast Show With Glenn And The Flying Dutchman
10.00 Cheryl Miles
PM
4.00 Weekdays With ONE FM

MONEY FM 89.3

AM
6.00 The Breakfast Huddle With Elliott Danker, Yasmin Jonkers & Ryan Huang
10.00 Midday With Howie Lim
PM
2.00 Prime Time With Claressa Monteiro
4.00 The Curve With Michelle Martin & Bernard Lim

UFM100.3

AM
6.00 UFM100.3 Mornings With Wenhong, Limei & Xiaozhu
10.00 Lively Life With Kemlin
PM
1.00 Tea With Yuling
4.00 Sing-a-long With Xinying & Weilong
8.00 Feel The Night With Chengyao

96.3 HAO FM

AM
6.00 Morning Drive Time With Jing Yun, De Ming And Jie Qi
10.00 Lunch Break With Anna
PM
1.00 Automation
4.00 Evening Drive Time With Li Yi And Guo Xian
8.00 Night Time With Wei Wen

Tides

SUN RISE/SET TIME: 7:15am/7:19pm
MOON RISE/SET TIME: 10:27pm/10.01am

TIDES TODAY: Singapore: 1.50am (3m), 7:16am (1.3m), 1pm (3.4m), 7:48pm (0.3m). Desaru: 1.26am (3m), 6:52am (1.7m), 12:16pm (2.8m), 6:58pm (0.5m). Port Dickson: 3.34am (0.1m), 8:53am (2.7m), 4:04pm (0.2m), 9:28pm (2.8m). Mersing: 12:52am (3.5m), 7:03am (1.8m), 11:48am (2.6m), 6:24pm (0.6m).

TIDES TOMORROW: Singapore: 2.30am (3m), 8:05am (1.3m), 1:50pm (3.3m), 8:37pm (0.4m). Desaru: 2:05am (3m), 7:37am (1.6m), 1:13pm (2.8m), 7:46pm (0.7m). Port Dickson: 4:18am (0.2m), 9:37am (2.6m), 4:34pm (0.3m), 10:06pm (2.7m). Mersing: 1:33am (3.4m), 7:49am (1.7m), 12:47pm (2.6m), 7:10pm (0.9m).

For updates and more details, call Meteorological Service Singapore, NEA, on 6542-7788 or go to www.nea.gov.sg

StarHub TV

HISTORY (CHANNEL 401)

AM
10.25 History Drama: Project Blue Book
PM
12.15 Football Godfathers
1.10 The Pickers 11
2.05 Pawn Stars 18
2.35 Storage Wars: Texas 6
3.00 Storage Wars 10
3.30 History Drama: Project Blue Book
5.20 Ancient Aliens 10
6.15 The Pickers 11
7.10 Pawn Stars 19
8.05 Storage Wars: Miami
8.30 Storage Wars 10
9.00 Forged In Fire 5
9.55 History Drama: Vikings 5
10.50 History Drama: Knightfall
11.45 Football Godfathers

LIFETIME (CHANNEL 514)

AM
11.00 Zoo 3
PM
12.00 Dance Moms 6
1.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
2.00 A Sister's Secret
3.35 Married At First Sight Australia 4
5.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
6.00 Idol Moms
7.00 This Time Next Year
8.00 Born This Way 2
9.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16
10.00 I Killed My BFF
11.35 Idol Moms

HBO (CHANNEL 601)

AM
11.35 Bleed For This (NC16)
PM
1.30 Psych: The Movie
3.00 True Detective 3 (NC16)
4.00 Barnyard
5.30 Anger Management
7.15 In Time (NC16)
9.00 It (NC16)
11.10 Crashing 3 (NC16)
11.40 High Maintenance 3 (M18)
AM
12.10 The Peacemaker (NC16)

CINEMAX (CHANNEL 611)

AM
11.15 Angel Rodriguez
PM
12.45 Big Momma's House 2 (NC16)
2.25 Sleepless (NC16)
4.00 Star Wars: Episode II – Attack Of The Clones
6.20 Fletch
7.55 The HBO Movie Show
8.25 Cellular
10.00 Patriots Day (NC16)

AM
12.10 Strike Back 5 (NC16)

HUB E CITY (CHANNEL 825)

AM
10.15 Chinese Restaurant 2 (HD)
PM
12.15 The Gentlemen Of Wolgyesu Tailor Shop (HD)
1.30 Tomorrow With You (HD)
2.45 Back To Youth (HD)
4.15 The Way To Wellness (HD)
4.45 The Gentlemen Of Wolgyesu Tailor Shop (HD)
6.00 Dowry (HD)
7.00 Hot Door Night 16 (HD)
8.00 Super Boys 2 (HD)
9.30 Fun Abroad (HD)
10.00 Noble Aspirations (HD)
11.00 Hot Door Night 16 (HD)

HUB SPORTS 1 (CHANNEL 201)

AM
7.00 Tennis: ATP 500 Citi Open Day 6 Semi-finals
PM
12.30 Table Tennis: Seamaster ITTF World Tour Hungarian Open: Men's Quarter-finals, Women & Men's Doubles Finals
3.30 Horse Racing: FEI Equestrian World 2018/4.00 Tennis: Deuce
4.30 Tennis: ATP World Tour Uncovered
5.00 Tennis: ATP Champions Tour 2018
5.30 ISU European Figure Skating Championships: Men's Short Programme
11.00 Multi Sport: Action Sports World 2018
AM
12.25 ISU European Figure Skating Championships: Pairs Free Skating

HUB SPORTS 2 (CHANNEL 202)

AM
10.00 Asean Basketball League: Hong Kong Eastern Vs Westports Malaysia Dragons (Same Day Delayed)
PM
12.00 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
12.30 Asean Basketball League: Zhuhai Wolf Warriors Vs San Miguel Alab Pilipinas
2.30 Football: EFL Carabao Cup 2018 Semi-finals 2: Leg 2: Burton Albion Vs Manchester City
4.30 Wrestling: WWE Raw (PG13)
7.00 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
7.30 Asean Basketball League: Macau Black Bears Vs Formosa Dreamers (Live)
9.30 Wrestling: WWE Smackdown (PG)
11.00 Fiba World Basketball
11.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
AM
12.00 Wrestling: WWE Raw (PG13)
3.00 Magazine: Omnisport.TV
3.45 Football: EFL Carabao Cup 2018 Semi-finals 2: Leg 2: Chelsea Vs Tottenham Hotspur (Live)

Singtel TV

CARTOON NETWORK (CHANNEL 226)

AM
10.00 We Bare Bears
10.30 Supernoobs
11.00 The Powerpuff Girls
PM
12.00 Teen Titans Go!
1.00 We Bare Bears
2.00 Ninjago: Masters Of Spinjitzu
2.30 The Powerpuff Girls
3.00 Running Man Animation
3.30 The Amazing World Of Gumball
4.00 We Bare Bears
4.30 The Powerpuff Girls
5.00 Teen Titans Go!
5.30 Ben 10
6.00 Oggy & The Cockroaches
6.30 Running Man Animation
7.00 The Tom And Jerry Show
7.30 Grizzly And The Lemmings
8.00 We Bare Bears
9.00 The Powerpuff Girls
10.00 Regular Show
10.30 Steven Universe
11.00 Clarence
11.30 Adventure Time

AXN (HD) (CHANNEL 304)

AM
10.00 Killjoys 3
10.50 Caught On Camera With Nick Cannon 3
11.40 Carnage
PM
12.35 MacGyver
1.25 Quantico 2
2.15 American Ninja Warrior 8
3.05 Killjoys 3
3.55 Carnage
4.45 MacGyver
5.35 American Ninja Warrior 8
6.25 Seal Team 2
7:15 Caught On Camera With Nick Cannon 2
8.05 Criminal Minds: Beyond Borders
9.45 MacGyver 3
10.35 Terminator 3: Rise Of The Machines
AM
12.45 Caught On Camera With Nick Cannon 3
2.25 American Ninja Warrior 8
3.15 MacGyver
4.05 Killjoys 3
5.00 Caught On Camera With Nick Cannon 2

WARNER TV (HD) (CHANNEL 306)

AM
10.10 Clipaholics
11.00 Top 20 Funniest 2
11.50 Harry Potter And The Sorcerer's Stone
PM
2.40 Harry Potter And The Chamber Of Secrets
5.35 Top 20 Funniest

6.25 The Flash 3
7.15 The Big Bang Theory 9
7.40 Friends 9
8.10 Top 20 Funniest 2
9.00 Batman
11.20 Friends 9
11.50 The Big Bang Theory 12

COMEDY CENTRAL ASIA (HD) (CHANNEL 324)

AM
10.20 Most Ridiculous 2
10.45 Almost Royals 2
11.15 Saturday Night Live 43
PM
12.05 The Daily Show 24
12.30 The Goldbergs 5
1.20 Hot In Cleveland 5
2.10 All Access: Sugar Sammy
3.00 Takeshi's Castle 4
3.25 Most Ridiculous 2
3.50 The Goldbergs 5
4.40 Hot In Cleveland 5
5.30 The Jim Jefferies Show
5.55 The Daily Show 24
6.20 Caraoke Showdown
6.45 Your Face Or Mine 3
7.10 Most Ridiculous 2
7.35 Billy On The Street 5
8.05 Takeshi's Castle 4
8.30 The Goldbergs 5
9.20 Hot In Cleveland 5
9.45 Hot In Cleveland 6
10.10 Inglorious Pranksters
10.20 Above Average Presents
10.30 Inside Amy Schumer
10.50 The Fuccons
11.00 The Jim Jefferies Show
11.25 The Fuccons
11.30 The Daily Show 24
AM
12.05 Russell Simmons Presents 2
12.25 Saturday Night Live 43
1.15 Inside Amy Schumer
1.35 The Fuccons
1.45 The Jim Jefferies Show
2.10 The Fuccons
2.15 The Daily Show 24
2.45 Russell Simmons Presents 2
3.10 Most Ridiculous 2
3.40 Death Valley
4.55 Billy On The Street 5
5.20 The Fuccons
5.30 Takeshi's Castle 4

JIA LE (HD) (CHANNEL 502)

AM
10.00 100% Wife
PM
12.10 First Love
1.00 In The Name Of Love
2.00 100% Wife
4.10 Entrepreneurial Age
5.00 First Love
6.00 In The Name Of Love
7.00 100% Wife
9.10 First Love
10.00 Entrepreneurial Age
11.00 Eagle And Youngster

Reynolds delays surgery to promote Deadpool 2



BEIJING • Surgery can wait for Ryan Reynolds (left). The financial health of his movie *Deadpool 2* is more important to him.

That is the attitude of the actor who postponed treatment in New York for an arm injury in order to fly to Beijing last Sunday to promote his superhero movie, trade publication *Variety* reported.

“It’s been a dream of mine for years to bring *Deadpool* to China and Chinese audiences, so for me this is, uh, heaven on earth,” he told fans at an event to whip up buzz for the PG13-rated movie.

The movie, unlike Reynolds, had to undergo “surgery” to remove elements that would fall foul of the strict censorship standards in China.

The original R-rated version blitzed cinemas in the United States about eight months ago.

Of his decision to skip surgery for the injury to his left arm that was sustained while shooting the movie, Reynolds said: “This was more important. I was not going to miss coming to China.”

He did not say it, but the Chinese box office – the world’s second-largest – is very important to Hollywood as it looks to recoup the bloated budgets linked to tentpole superhero movies.

But there is another “surgery” that Reynolds does not intend to delay any longer.

Stating that he and his team are currently plotting the next instalment of the *Deadpool* franchise, he revealed that they were “looking to go in a completely different direction”.

“Often, they reboot or change a character maybe like four movies too late,” he noted, not wanting such ill-fortune to fall on his character.

‘Tired’ Lagerfeld misses two shows



PARIS • There were plenty of models at the Chanel shows, but where was Karl Lagerfeld (left)?

The label later explained his absence on Tuesday from two haute couture outings in Paris, saying the veteran designer “was tired”.

The 85-year-old left his studio head Virginie Viard to take the bow for him at the end of his spring-summer collection.

The no-show set off talk that Lagerfeld, who has ruled over fashion for a large part of the past half-century, may be about to take a step back.

With fashionistas expecting the traditional theatrical reveal at the end of the show, with Lagerfeld appearing somewhere on the extravagant set, a Chanel executive emerged in his stead to announce the couturier’s absence.

He said Lagerfeld would be at a second show for super-rich clientele. But a Chanel spokesman later told *Agence France-Presse* the designer was not able to attend that event either.

Ms Helene Guillaume, a journalist with French daily *Le Figaro*, said Lagerfeld was “very weak” at a pre-show briefing on Monday.

Executives said he never made it as far as the Grand Palais where his collection was to be shown on a vast palm tree-fringed set styled after the gardens of an Italian villa.

Lagerfeld, who in 2015 said that he “has never thought of retiring”, is understood to have carte blanche from Chanel’s owners to choose when he wants to step down.

In recent years, he has visibly weakened, but his extraordinary creative stamina showed little sign of flagging, with a joyously zingy beach-set collection that was one of the highlights of the previous Paris fashion week.

His new show, which the brand insisted he drew himself, took inspiration from “his favourite century, the 18th”. *AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE*

On social media



PHOTO: REUTERS

A FITTING RESPONSE: Singer Bebe Rexha has given fashion designers a dressing down. The American pop star, who is up for Best New Artist at next month’s Grammys, posted online that she is struggling to find a dress for the ceremony, with designers calling her “too big”.

“I had my team hit (up) a lot of designers,” the 29-year-old said. “And a lot of them do not want to dress me because I’m too big. If a size 6/8 is too big, then I don’t know what to tell you. Then I don’t want to wear your f***ing dresses,” Rexha lashed out. “You’re saying that all the women in the world that are size 8 and up are not beautiful and they cannot wear your dresses.”

Celebrities, including singer Adam Lambert and model

Tyra Banks, tweeted their support for Rexha, who said her “size 8 ass” will still be attending the Grammys gala on Feb 10.

The singer did not say which designers had turned her down, but her rant underscored the enduring challenge faced by women artists who cannot shimmy into samples, generally limited to runway model sizes 0 to 4.

A handful of designers have offered to come to her rescue. High-profile designer Christian Siriano, who has made a point of dressing curvier stars in the past, tweeted that “we have dressed @BebeRexha a few times and would love to do it again”.

And eveningwear specialist Elizabeth Kennedy said: “I’d love to make you a dress for the Grammys. I’m a size 8 too, and yes it is a beautiful size.” *AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE*

China collects \$2b in unpaid taxes from celebrities

SHANGHAI • Chinese authorities have collected more than 11 billion yuan (\$\$2.2 billion) in unpaid taxes from celebrities and entertainment companies since they hit the industry with a crackdown.

State media *Xinhua*, citing the national tax bureau and content watchdog, said the campaign, which began in October, had ended and companies and workers had been ordered to correct their tax records.

The most famous star to get caught up in the clampdown was actress Fan Bingbing.

She was ordered to pay about US\$129 million (\$\$175 million) in overdue taxes and fines in October, after a four-month disappearance from the public eye.

Fan issued an apology, saying she accepted the decision, would overcome “all difficulties” to pay the penalties and would step up supervision of her companies.

Industry insiders have lamented

that a “cold winter” has descended on the business since the authorities launched the checks, with film projects stalling and investors selling off related company shares.

Huayi Brothers Media Corp, a company linked to Fan, has seen its share price halved since last year, while movie box-office revenue growth in the world’s second-largest market after the United States slowed last year.

The authorities said the industry should set its mind at rest and focus on work, but added that it would continue to target companies and individuals deemed highly exposed to tax-related risks.

Industry workers should “practise socialist core values... and strive to be entertainment workers with belief, empathy and sense of responsibility in the new era”, the authorities said, according to *Xinhua*. *REUTERS*

Erykah Badu booed for supporting R. Kelly

CHICAGO • Singer-songwriter Erykah Badu was booed by a Chicago crowd after voicing sympathy for R. Kelly at a concert in Chicago.

A few songs into her show at the Aragon Ballroom, Badu took a break from her set to talk about the R&B singer, who continues to face fallout from *Surviving R. Kelly*, a Lifetime documentary series that spotlighted decades of abuse allegations against him.

“I’m putting up a prayer right now for R,” Badu said, according to videos posted on social media.

The singer redirected the audience from criticising R. Kelly, saying: “That’s not love.”

Badu then wondered aloud if one of his alleged victims would also be crucified if she grew up to be an offender.

“It’s just something to think about,” Badu said.

On Sunday, Badu appeared to clarify her comments on Twitter, writing: “I love you. Unconditionally.”

“That doesn’t mean I support your poor choices. I want healing for you and anyone you have hurt as a result of you being hurt.” *DPA*

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HPB tracking health data of 2,000 adults in real time

Study, which will include 8,000 more people, will help refine public health efforts

Felicia Choo

Nearly every day, Ms Geeta Khandelwal wears a smart watch linked to an app that sends the Health Promotion Board (HPB) real-time data about her health such as heart rate, number of steps she walked, sedentary time and sleep.

She also diligently logs her daily meals and drinks into the app, right down to the portion size.

The 38-year-old freelance consultant and editor is one of 2,000 working adults here who are part of a \$1.2 million, two-year HPB study that mines their data to personalise health promotion efforts.

The study, called Health Insights Singapore, or hiSG for short, will also serve as a resource for future public health research, according to HPB chief executive officer Zee Young Kang.

It could also be used to test policies before they are implemented, he added.

The study marks HPB's foray into precision public health management, generally defined as providing the correct intervention to the right population at the right time.

"Public health (management) struggles because it operates at a high level of generalisation. Therefore, individuals find it very hard to implement a lot of this advice," said Mr Zee. "We now have the opportunity to be much more precise, so we do anticipate that many of our guidelines can be refined and maybe overturned."

HPB recruited participants aged 21 to 40 last August, targeting this age group as it is the period when obesity rates are observed to spike.

To build a comprehensive profile of each participant, the HPB collects details like their age, gender, body



6,100

Average daily step count of the least active participants, of whom more were underweight (15 per cent) than overweight (12 per cent) or obese (7 per cent).

13,500

Average daily step count of the exercise enthusiasts, who had the biggest proportion of overweight (26 per cent) and obese (14 per cent) participants.

Participant Geeta Khandelwal says the Health Insights Singapore study is a good opportunity to be more mindful of some of her bad habits.

ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

mass index (BMI) and fitness level.

Participants also have to meet requirements such as wearing the smart watch for at least eight hours a day, on at least five weekdays and two weekends each month, and recording what they eat on at least three days every three months.

Participants pay a deposit of \$50 for the smart watch, a Fitbit Ionic.

As a form of motivation, their deposit is returned if they stick to the study's requirements. If they don't, they forfeit their \$50.

Another incentive is the points participants can rack up when they fulfil criteria like logging their meals and syncing steps data from watch to app. These can be exchanged for

food and shopping vouchers.

Five months in, the study has thrown up some intriguing preliminary findings. For example, researchers found that of the least active participants, who averaged a daily step count of 6,100, more were underweight (15 per cent) than overweight (12 per cent) or obese (7 per cent).

Meanwhile, the exercise enthusiasts, who averaged 13,500 steps a day, had the biggest proportion of overweight (26 per cent) and obese (14 per cent) participants.

The HPB said the overweight participants, who are clocking more steps, may be more muscular or are trying to lose weight.

By next month, a mood scale will be rolled out, so people can log how they feel a few times a day, and short surveys will be introduced in the app within the next six months.

Eventually, participants will receive personalised nudges to improve their health.

The HPB is also scaling up the study and aims to recruit another 8,000 participants from various age groups.

They will comprise students from higher learning institutes, final-year students about to enter the workforce, specific occupation and industry groups with a larger proportion of mature workers, and semi-retired and retired seniors.

The HPB spends on average \$400 to \$500 on each participant, including the rewards (redeemed with the points), with the smart watches forming the bulk of the cost.

Organisations like Nanyang Polytechnic, the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Duke-NUS Medical School are working with the HPB to conduct studies on participants.

Ms Geeta said: "It was a good opportunity to be more mindful of some of my bad habits like sleeping late and having a sedentary lifestyle. I get a free Fitbit and get to be part of something larger."

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Most oBike users yet to file claim for refund of deposit

Only \$438,900 worth of claims filed out of \$8.9m oBike owes its 220,000 users here

Toh Ting Wei

The majority of oBike users have not yet filed claims to retrieve their deposits, the firm's liquidators revealed yesterday.

But even for those who have filed claims, there is no timeline yet as to when they can get their money back as liquidator FTI Consulting continues debt settlement talks with oBike's new majority shareholder.

The bicycle operator ended its Singapore operations unexpectedly last June, after about 18 months of operation here. Its sudden exit had left users wondering whether they would get a refund of the deposit of up to \$49 which they had to make in order to use the bikes.

As of Tuesday noon, deposit holders have lodged only \$438,878.43 worth of claims, a small percentage of the \$8.91 million that the firm registered in its records.

"Quite a lot of deposit holders are yet to file their claims with the liquidators," said FTI senior managing director Joshua Taylor.

According to oBike's records, it has more than 220,000 deposit holders in Singapore.

The liquidators did not give a breakdown of the number of people who have already filed for refunds at the meeting with oBike's creditors at Shaw Tower yesterday.

About 18 people, made up of both oBike users with unrefunded deposits and companies which are owed money, attended the 42-minute session.

In contrast to the fraction of

users who are looking to retrieve their deposits, a much larger proportion of other creditors have already filed claims against oBike.

As of Tuesday noon, trade creditors, vendors, regulatory agencies and town councils have filed \$768,700 worth of claims against oBike, a higher number than about \$497,700 of outstanding claims stated in the firm's records.

Mr Taylor also revealed that FTI had recovered about \$541,000 from oBike through selling its bicycles and recovering funds held by third-party service providers.

Creditors are unlikely to receive a payout from this sum, he said in re-

sponse to a question from an attendee. "That is an option, but if you look at it, there are cost and expenses associated with liquidation... So if we did that, I don't think there will be a great return at all to creditors," said Mr Taylor.

A lifeline for creditors, however, could come in the form of oBike's new owner, Costa Rican investment group OSS Inversiones. FTI said it is working with OSS on the proposed terms for the latter to settle outstanding claims against oBike.

Mr Taylor said: "We will continue to liaise with the investor on an agreement, and hopefully at some point in the near future, we will make a public announcement with the investor regarding whether an agreement has been reached."

He added that FTI had already provided additional information on claims against oBike to OSS, as requested by the group.

But a representative for OSS, Mr Samuel Chaves, told The Straits Times later yesterday that it had yet to receive such information.

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Yap Bin Chun misappropriated over \$200,000 from his client after getting him to sign various forms. ST PHOTO: WONG KWAI CHOW

Bank exec cheated client who cannot read English

Shaffiq Alkhatib

A United Overseas Bank (UOB) relationship manager abused his English-illiterate client's trust and misappropriated more than \$200,000 from the man after convincing him to sign various forms.

Yap Bin Chun, who worked for the bank from 2009 to 2013, met Mr Ng Hock Seng, 68, in 2010. The court heard that Mr Ng, who used to run a mini-mart in Hougang, cannot read, write and understand English.

Yap, a married man, also duped a woman from Hong Kong into thinking he was single and she became his girlfriend.

The court heard that the Singaporean father of three later cheated Hong Konger Betty Pui Tai, 38, of more than HK\$100,000 (about \$20,000).

Yesterday, Yap, 38, pleaded guilty to four cheating charges and one count of forgery.

Mr Ng told Yap in 2011 that he wanted to use his savings for a low-risk investment. Yap, facing financial difficulties, hatched a plan to misappropriate Mr Ng's money and went to his home in September that year.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Kenneth Chin said: "During this meeting, the accused also asked Ng to sign an application form for a UOB current account, as well as an application form for a UOB Visa debit card which was to be linked to the current account. The accused did not tell Ng what the forms were for. Although Ng did not understand the forms, he signed as he was asked to."

The court heard that Yap later wrote his own home address on the current account application form without Mr Ng's knowledge. Yap also wrote his address on the debit card application form and the card was mailed to his home on Sept 13, 2011.

Monies linked to Mr Ng's investment were later credited to the current account. Between Oct 3 that year and March 20, 2012, Yap misappropriated more than \$200,000 from the account by using the debit card.

The offences came to light only on Feb 24, 2016, when Mr Ng went to UOB to check on the status of his finances. He lodged a police report five days later. After investigating, UOB paid him more than \$200,000 as a settlement for the losses he suffered.

On June 6, 2016, the Commercial Affairs Department took a statement from Yap, who eventually repaid the bank the amount.

DPP Chin said Yap obtained the money from Ms Pui, who was his girlfriend since October 2015. He had borrowed about \$500,000 from the Hong Konger and has not repaid her.

In December 2016, Yap messaged her, posing as his brother, and claimed that \$20,000 was needed for his "bail". Ms Pui transferred the money over later that month. Yap, who is represented by lawyer Diana Ngiam, is now out on bail of \$40,000. He is expected to be sentenced on March 14.

Responding to queries from The Straits Times, UOB said it does not tolerate any employee's breach of its code of conduct, which is "values-based and sets the requirement for all to uphold the highest professional and ethical standards".

The bank's spokesman said any employee who violates the code faces disciplinary action.

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Visitors at the preview of the S.E.A. Focus art fair yesterday. Last week, organisers of Art Stage Singapore, another art fair, cancelled the event that was supposed to have run from tomorrow to Sunday. Since the cancellation, there has been a groundswell of support from the community, with private venues, galleries and corporate entities offering their spaces to the stranded galleries. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

How arts sector rallied shows strong spirit: Grace Fu

Toh Wen Li

Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu commended the strong spirit of Singapore's arts sector after the sudden cancella-

tion of Art Stage Singapore.

Speaking at the launch of the new boutique art fair S.E.A. Focus yesterday, Ms Fu said: "The camaraderie and strong spirit of the arts sector was in full demonstration."

Art Stage Singapore, the coun-

try's major contemporary art fair, was supposed to have run from tomorrow to Sunday in what would have been its ninth edition.

However, organisers cancelled it on Jan 16, just nine days before its public opening, with the fair's

founder, Mr Lorenzo Rudolf, citing poor local sales and "unequal competition", referring to the new fair S.E.A. Focus at Gillman Barracks.

Ms Fu said she was "disappointed and saddened by this decision made at such short notice", but

found it "heartening to see many galleries and groups coming forward to support the affected exhibitors".

Since the event's cancellation, there has been a groundswell of support from the community, with private venues, galleries and corporate entities offering their spaces to the stranded galleries.

Non-profit group Art Outreach organised The ARTery, a new pop-up showcase that will feature 14 of the affected galleries at the Marina Bay Sands Expo & Convention Centre from today to Sunday.

The ARTery is supported by the National Arts Council, Singapore Tourism Board and Economic Development Board - agencies which backed S.E.A. Focus as well as Art Stage Singapore.

"That we can respond so well and so quickly to the situation that Art Stage created shows the network and depth of the Singapore visual arts ecosystem," Ms Fu added.

Turning to S.E.A. Focus, an initiative by STPI - Creative Workshop & Gallery, and one of the highlights of the annual Singapore Art Week, Ms Fu said the inaugural fair can help artists and galleries build capabilities as well as position Singapore globally.

"We believe the arts have the power to connect people across communities and nations. As artists, exhibitors and galleries collaborate across boundaries, we can raise awareness of our artistic heritage," she said.

This year's S.E.A. Focus, which has 26 participating Singapore and international galleries, is open to the public from today to Sunday.

Businesswoman Rosalind Lee, 62, speaking to The Straits Times minutes after the exhibition's preview began, said she had already bought three works by young Filipino artist Brisa Amir, from the Philippines-based gallery Artinformal.

The art collector, who plans to display these works at home, said she would return to future editions of S.E.A. Focus.

"I've been able to see more new and up-and-coming artists. This fair will get Singaporeans exposed to more art."

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Sembcorp, S'pore Poly to recycle old solar panels

Partnership will see the setting up of pilot recycling plant and skills training for sector

Cheryl Teh

Solar energy is growing as a source of clean, renewable energy in Singapore. But this raises a key and pressing challenge for the industry here: Where do all the used solar panels go at the end of their lifespan?

The International Renewable Energy Agency estimates that by 2050, the world would have produced 60 million tonnes of photovoltaic panel waste.

Local company Sembcorp Industries and Singapore Polytechnic (SP) say they have a solution to the problem. They signed a collabora-

tion yesterday to commercialise what is said to be Singapore's first solar panel recycling process.

Developed locally by researchers, it involves extracting 90 per cent of recyclable materials, such as glass, silicon and metals, from used solar panels. Under the collaboration, they will also develop a pilot recycling plant for solar panels.

The technology will eventually be used to help recycle panels from Sembcorp's rooftop solar projects in Singapore that are located at public housing blocks, schools, government sites, and private commercial and industrial facilities.

If the technology proves commer-

cially viable, the pilot plant can then serve as a potential prototype for larger-scale recycling of used solar panels in Singapore, and beyond.

They hope this will help minimise waste and ensure that photovoltaic energy remains environmentally friendly.

Sembcorp and SP will also work to increase and strengthen the pool of skilled manpower for the growth of solar energy here.

This will come in the form of jointly developed course curricula at the polytechnics, internships and programmes for managers, engineers and technicians working on solar projects. The curricula will complement SP's current course material on solar energy systems and deployment.

"The partnership with Sembcorp provides Singapore Polytechnic a



The initiative between Sembcorp Industries and Singapore Polytechnic will help Singapore develop an approach in which solar projects will be seen through from the stages of procurement, design and installation and operation to beyond the end of their operational lives. PHOTO: SEMBCORP

platform to test its innovative solution that can potentially be a game changer for Singapore's zero-waste vision. The collaboration also allows us to play a part in keeping Singapore's workforce relevant to the changing needs of the industry through our robust full-time and continuing education training courses," said SP deputy principal Lim Peng Hun.

Solar panels here have yet to come to the end of their lifespan of around 25 years.

The initiatives, Sembcorp said, will help Singapore develop an approach in which solar projects will be seen through from the stages of procurement, design and installation and operation to beyond the end of their operational lives.

"We believe this focus on responsible resource management is especially timely, given that 2019 has been declared Singapore's Year Towards Zero Waste. At the same time, we also see a strong need to build up a pool of skilled talent in

Singapore, to support future solar projects competently," said Mr Koh Chiap Khiong, head of Sembcorp's energy business in Singapore, South-east Asia and China.

To seal the partnership, a memorandum of collaboration was signed by Mr Koh and Mr Lim. Officials from Singapore's Economic Development Board, Energy Market Authority and National Environment Agency were also present.

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Man gets jail, fine for fund-raising and charity offences

Shaffiq Alkhatib

A man ran a company collecting public donations without a licence and failed to provide the necessary documents when ordered to do so by the Commissioner of Charities (COC). Cavin Tan Cher Kuan, 36, was sentenced to 16 weeks' jail and a fine of \$2,000 yesterday.

This is believed to be the first case in which a person is convicted of an offence by not complying with the COC's order to provide information on a fund-raising appeal.

The Singaporean pleaded guilty to one count each of offences under the House to House and Street Collections Act and the Charities Act. He also admitted that he dealt with fake designer apparel and used criminal force on a police officer.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Benjamin Samynathan said Tan incorporated his firm Joint Creation International (JCI) on Aug 21, 2013. Two months later, it entered an agreement with motor workshop Spade Auto.

For one month, JCI would sell vouchers at \$10 each that would entitle the buyer to a \$50 discount at Spade Auto. JCI also employed at least five people, including Mr Jasper Phua Kian Wee, then 18.

On Nov 8, 2013, police received a call from Parkway Parade saying a group of youngsters was disturbing shoppers. A police officer spotted Mr Phua selling vouchers and the teenager said Tan had told him the proceeds would "go to charity, orphans and needy people".

The DPP told District Judge Ong Hian Sun that JCI did not have a licence to promote collections. Mr Phua was given a stern warning.

After this, JCI was renamed Alliance Career Entrepreneurship (ACE). Tan then persuaded non-profit organisation En Community Services Society (ECSS), which helps dysfunctional families, to enter into an agreement with ACE for a "fund-raiser" to be conducted between Feb 10 and May 10, 2014.

Under the agreement, ACE would donate between \$3,000 and \$5,000 to ECSS each month. Tan then obtained a house to house and street collections licence, which enabled the firm to solicit donations for ECSS.

DPP Benjamin said ECSS received many complaints about ACE's aggressive sales tactics. After the agreement expired, the police did not renew ACE's licence. No payments were made to ECSS, the DPP added.

On Oct 29, 2014, Tan was issued an order by the COC to furnish, by Nov 18 that year, documents relating to ACE's fund-raising activities. He failed to comply. Tan is out on bail of \$15,000 and ordered to surrender himself on Feb 20 to begin serving his sentence.

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Jurong Bird Park first zoo to breed endangered bird

4 chicks hatched from 60 Santa Cruz ground doves under its care

Ng Huiwen

Four baby Santa Cruz ground doves were hatched at Jurong Bird Park in recent weeks, making the park the first zoological institution in the world to successfully breed the highly threatened bird species under human care.

Wildlife Reserves Singapore (WRS) said in a statement yesterday that the first of the Santa Cruz ground dove chicks hatched on Dec 31 last year.

The bird, native to the Solomon Islands, is listed as endangered in the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List.

Given the volatile environment of the Solomon Islands, not much data on the species has been recorded, WRS said.

"This means that all the information that can be collected from the birds under human care is extremely valuable and may help better understand the species and its needs in the wild," it added.

In August last year, 60 Santa Cruz ground doves – probably half of the world's wild population – were rescued from poachers and erupting volcanoes on the Solomon Islands.

They were then taken to Jurong Bird Park to be bred.

The goal is to help the birds return to their homeland to boost their numbers.

Jurong Bird Park has also seen similar success with the straw-headed bulbul, a critically endangered songbird that is among the



most heavily traded of its kind in South-east Asia.

Singapore is likely to be the only stronghold of the species, with just over 200 remaining in the wild, according to the local nature community.

It is believed that the songbird is extinct in half of its range states in South-east Asia.

In the past two years, Jurong Bird Park has successfully bred four of these birds, with the newest chick arriving in July last year.

The first chick hatched in 2017, marking the first time in over a decade that these songbirds were bred under human care.

It was also the first time that this was done as part of a conservation breeding programme which Jurong Bird Park led.

Just like some other songbirds, this species of bulbul faces threats from illegal and unsustainable wildlife trade.

The chicks are on display at the park's Wings of Asia exhibit, which also houses other threatened avian species like the Santa Cruz ground dove.

nghuiwen@sph.com.sg

A father Santa Cruz ground dove with its chick at Jurong Bird Park. PHOTO: WILDLIFE RESERVES SINGAPORE

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TAKASHIMAYASG

Prison bans UK journalist over secret interview

Vanessa Liu

A reporter with the British daily newspaper Daily Mail has been barred by the Singapore Prison Service (SPS) from making further visits to British drug trafficker Yuen Ye Ming after he was found to have conducted an unauthorised interview with the latter for an article.

An SPS spokesman said Mr Stephen Wright, the writer of the article, spoke to Yuen through a video link last Friday at the Prison Link Centre in Geylang Bahru. He had been registered by Yuen's uncle to accompany the latter on the tele-visit as a family friend. Such visits by non-family members may be allowed if accompanied by registered family members.

"However, Mr Wright had not obtained permission from SPS to speak to Yuen in his capacity as a journalist for the Daily Mail, for the purpose of publicising the content of their conversation," said the spokesman. "SPS does not allow interviews to be conducted with prison inmates without prior approval. Wright had undertaken the tele-visit under false pretences. He will be barred from making any further visits."

The article by Mr Wright, published on the Daily Mail's website last Friday, was headlined "Ex-Westminster public schoolboy caught dealing drugs in Singapore opens up in his first interview since learning he'll be strapped naked to a frame and caned 24 times". It detailed the 29-year-old's life behind bars and his life story, as well as discussed the severity of his sentence, especially with respect to the caning.

London-born Yuen, who was a former disc jockey, was first arrested on Aug 5, 2016 and convicted in court on Jan 17 last year. He was released on court bail, pending his sentencing.

But he was arrested again a little over a month later, on Feb 20, while out on bail for committing similar drug-related offences.

Yuen was sentenced to 20 years in jail and 24 strokes of the cane for drug-related offences, including drug trafficking, drug consumption and drug possession.

British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, who was in Singapore on an official visit from Jan 4 to 5, brought up his case with Foreign Affairs Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, according to a spokesman for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The spokesman added: "Our consular staff have been assisting a British man and his family since his arrest in Singapore in 2016. We strongly oppose the use of corporal punishment, such as caning, in all cases."

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Swatch fails in bid to block Apple's iWatch trade mark

Swiss firm's mark not similar, smart watch not part of Apple's application: Registrar

K. C. Vijayan
Senior Law Correspondent

Swiss watch giant Swatch failed to block Apple from registering the iWatch trade mark in their tussle over distinguishing marks.

Apple had applied in 2016 to register the iWatch mark for a class of goods that included computers, computer hardware, computer peripherals and wireless communication devices, but not smart watches.

Swatch had opposed the move, arguing that the mark is similar to one of its own registered marks and the goods applied for by Apple could also be construed to include smart watches, regardless of Apple's intention.

Swatch's lawyers, Ms Vithyashree and Mr Ho Jia Hui, raised the likelihood of confusion, arguing that the close similarity and overlap between smart watches and traditional watches, for which Swatch has protection, meant that the goods of both companies are in direct competition.

Swatch has a worldwide presence and its corporate group owns a stable of Swiss watch brands, including Omega, Tissot and Swatch.

Apple, represented by Drew & Napier lawyer Eunice Maaland, contested the claims and underlined that Apple is not monopolising the letter "i", pointing out how there are other trade marks beginning with the same letter.

But given the many Apple trade marks that begin with "i", like iPhone, iPod and iPad, the public would recognise iWatch as belonging to the same family of products.

Principal Assistant Registrar of Trade Marks Sandy Widjaja in decision grounds last week found iWatch to be, on the whole, dissimilar to Swatch's unregistered Swatch mark, and overall, only slightly similar to Swatch's registered iSwatch mark, which has a stylised "i".

"I am proceeding on the assumption that both marks are only similar to the (iWatch) mark to a low extent," she said.

The registrar also addressed whether smart watches fell within the goods applied for by Apple despite the fact that the tech giant had left them out in its application.

Swatch argued that they did, as smart watches are effectively wearable computers with wireless connectivity and fall within the descriptions of computers, computer hardware, computer peripherals and wireless communication devices.

Ms Widjaja disagreed, however, and found that the many functions of a smart watch are ancillary to its core function of telling the time so

much so that a smart watch did not fall within the goods applied for by Apple.

In any event, smart watches tend "to command a greater degree of fastidiousness and attention" on the part of prospective buyers as they are highly personal items which blend function and style, she said.

The relevant group of consumers are "discerning, tech-savvy, fashion-conscious", added Ms Widjaja, in allowing Apple to proceed with registering the trade mark for the Singapore market.

"What is clear, though, is that Swatch's reputation in Singapore reduces the likelihood of confusion," she said.

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Car COE prices up after motor show

Certificate of entitlement (COE) prices ended mostly higher on the back of buying interest whipped up by the recently concluded Singapore Motorshow.

COE premium for cars of up to 1,600cc and 130bhp finished 1 per cent higher at \$26,170, while that for cars above 1,600cc or 130bhp closed 5.6 per cent up at \$33,989.

The price of Open COE, which can be used for any vehicle type except motorcycles but ends up mostly used for bigger cars, rose 2.4 per cent to \$33,689.

Motor traders attributed the price increases mainly to strong sales at the Singapore Motorshow. The annual event, which drew 56,000 visitors (up from 55,000 last year), ended on Jan 13.

Mr Ron Lim, general manager of Nissan agent Tan Chong Motor, said there is now a backlog of orders arising from the motor show. In fact, a number of dealers had raised car prices immediately after the event – a sign that they expected COE prices to rise.

"More Category B cars were sold at the show, so it's not surprising Cat B COE went up more," Mr Lim said.

Other factors contributing to the

	Cars up to 1,600cc and 130bhp	Cars above 1,600cc or 130bhp	Commercial vehicles	Motorcycles	Open
Yesterday's tender	\$26,170	\$33,989	\$26,230	\$2,889	\$33,689
Jan 9 tender	\$25,920	\$32,200	\$27,002	\$3,610	\$32,909

Source: LAND TRANSPORT AUTHORITY STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

rise in car COEs include a higher demand for private-hire cars since the arrival of Indonesian ride-hailing firm Gojek, and a possible dip in COE supply from next month.

But Mr Samuel Yong, marketing director for Toyota and Lexus distributor Borneo Motors, said the "motor show effect" was the main reason for the climb.

"Personally, I was a little surprised that prices did not go even higher," he said. "From what we know, a lot of dealers had good orders from the show. We got what we wanted."

Meanwhile, commercial vehicle COE ended 2.9 per cent lower at \$26,230.

Motorcycle premium tumbled 20 per cent to close at \$2,889.

Christopher Tan

SOARING DEMAND

Personally, I was a little surprised that prices did not go even higher. From what we know, a lot of dealers had good orders from the show. We got what we wanted.



MR SAMUEL YONG, marketing director for Toyota and Lexus distributor Borneo Motors, on the increase in COE for cars.

Upskilling to stay ahead

Wok-king the talk

The Wok People shares its secret recipe behind winning the SkillsFuture Employer Awards 2018

BY MICHELLE CHIN

The Wok People (TWP) is introducing a meal-ordering app this year that will cut waiting time for diners and reduce food wastage, a common problem in the food and beverage (F&B) sector.

Diners will pre-order their meals via the app and indicate their preferred meal timings. This digital ordering process will ensure meals are served quickly, and that diners will not miss out on their favourite daily lunch specials due to overwhelming demand for certain dishes.

In the next three months, to help its staff learn more about this new digital ordering process, TWP will send around 300 Singaporean employees on a two-day SkillsFuture for Digital Workplace course conducted by the Asian Culinary Institute.

The class will also teach kitchen automation, robotic servers, data analytics and cyber security.

Such training will also help the staff manage a new digitalised bill payment system to be rolled out this year.

Formed in 2009, TWP is an institutional caterer that helps feed staff of more than 60 organisations such as hotel Mandarin Oriental.

TWP's 42-year-old managing director Alfred Chua says: "We are not viewing technology in this labour-intensive industry



Mr Chua sees technology as complementary to the F&B industry. PHOTO: TED CHEN

as a disruption but as a complement to the employee cafeteria service we are offering.

"Technology can help with the lean manpower and raise productivity, as well as improve customer service," adds Mr Chua, who has more than 20 years of experience in the F&B industry.

With manpower a constant challenge for the F&B industry, TWP joined the SkillsFuture SME Mentors programme in 2017 to re-look its business model and the job roles of its employees. An F&B industry expert was brought in to help TWP evaluate its operational processes and to suggest training frameworks to equip staff with new skills.

Extensive training plans were drawn up for all levels of TWP's career ladder.

The company tapped the SkillsFuture for Food Services, another SkillsFuture

initiative, to suss out detailed skill requirements and career pathways for roles such as kitchen assistant and F&B supervisor.

Mr Stanley Tan, 39, an assistant operations manager in charge of a team of 25 including baristas and sous chefs, was sent to at least five different courses since he joined the company in March 2016. They included courses on food hygiene, team management, customer service, housekeeping and waste minimisation.

He highlighted the two-day Cultivate Workplace Relationships to Optimise Team Performance course, which taught him ways to support his staff as well as manage conflicts within a diverse team.

He says: "I do not feel that my job is just about clocking in hours. The company cares about my development, and that empowers me to do my job better."

A SPECIAL FEATURE BY

SKILLSFuture

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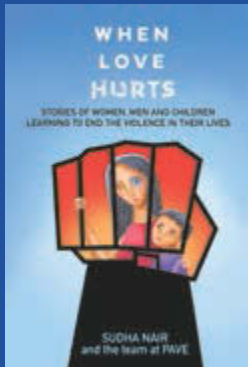


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Passion for learning

Mr Edwin Low, recipient of the SkillsFuture Fellowships Award 2018, is a strong believer in lifelong learning

BY JOSHUA WONG

Not many people would sell their home to pursue their passion — yet that was exactly what Mr Edwin Low did.

The 39-year-old and his wife quit their jobs and sold their four-room HDB flat in 2011 to raise money for their own business. The couple also wanted more time for the family.

In honour of his wife's support, Mr Low named the company Supermama.

Established with little fanfare in 2011, Supermama did not even have a logo during its first year of operations. The design and crafts store started out by selling unique gifts and souvenirs sourced from Japan.

The company struggled initially as neither Mr Low nor his wife had business experience, though Mr Low had degrees in Industrial



Design and taught the subject in polytechnic.

The turning-point came in 2013, when a chance meeting with a Japanese craftsman along Orchard Road set Mr Low on his own path of self discovery.

He decided to challenge himself and create his own line of products.

He built his business the hard way: through trial and error and the school of hard knocks. He had to solve problems as they arose, figuring out on his own details like supply chain management and point-

of-sales systems.

To adopt the best practices, he learnt from other local independent stores such as BooksActually. He also met store-owners in Japan to learn about the craftsmen from whom they source their products, expanding his network of suppliers further. Since then, the Beach Road store has carried exquisite blue-and-white porcelain pieces featuring uniquely Singaporean imagery such as kebaya motifs and local landmarks like Marina Bay Sands and the Merlion.

Mr Low is a firm believer in lifelong learning.

PHOTO: TED CHEN

These soon caught the attention of the design community in Singapore. In 2013, Mr Low won the Design of the Year Award under the President's Design Award, an accolade conferred by the DesignSingapore Council (Dsg).

The father of three did not rest on his laurels and continued to expand his network of contacts. He now works with not just porcelain-makers, but also glass-blowers, metalworkers and paper-makers from Japan.

In nominating Mr Low for the SkillsFuture Fellowships Award 2018, the Dsg cites Supermama's unique position as a platform that brings craftsmen and designers together.

The award, says Mr Low, has reinforced his unwavering belief in lifelong learning.

"I'm humbled and thankful to receive this award, which celebrates an individual's attitude towards learning," he says.

"The only constant in life is change, and the only way to adapt is to learn."

MerdekaGeneration

From shy guy to avid volunteer

While the pioneer leaders were the architects of Singapore, everyday heroes helped build society here. This is the start of our new series Merdeka Generation, about those born in the 1950s who lived and persevered through a tumultuous period.

MERDEKA GENERATION
Know a Singaporean born in the 1950s who has lived a storied life? E-mail us at rahimahr@sph.com.sg

Rahimah Rashith

For the longest time in his youth, Mr Abdul Rashid Ibrahim was too shy to talk to girls.

Born in 1955 to a mechanic father and housewife mother, Mr Rashid was the third of 12 children – nine boys and three girls.

“I would tell my sisters not to walk beside me because I did not want anyone to think that (the one with me) was my girlfriend,” he recalled.

At 19 years old, he was conscripted for national service and later decided to sign on with the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF).

During the early 1970s, he worked as a motor transport section commander and was in charge of the servicing and scheduling of maintenance and repairs for military vehicles. In the 1980s, he was posted to Seletar Camp, where he trained young army personnel in driving.

By the time he ended his service with SAF in 1997, he was the commander for two platoons.

Seletar Camp is also where Mr Rashid, then a sergeant, met his wife, Madam Fazilah Mohamed. “She was also an army regular,” he said. “The moment I saw my wife standing at a door, something in my heart tingled and told me that is my wife. That was my first love.”

But he was too shy to make the first move.

“One day when I was sitting in a bus, I saw her wave at me from another seat,” he said. “I was happy but I was too shy to do anything.”



“The next day... I saw her walking towards the canteen. I walked up to her but the words that came out of my mouth were ‘Where is your shame? Why did you wave at me yesterday?’” he laughed. “Then I just sprinted (off) as fast as I could.”

Over the next couple of months, Mr Rashid would watch Madam Fazilah from afar, too afraid to make the first move, while she was oblivious to the situation.

When he finally found the courage to chat with her, he asked her to marry him. “She was so shocked, she did not know how to react,” said Mr Rashid.

She then asked him to meet her mother if he was serious about it.

They tied the knot in 1981 and a year later, their elder daughter, Ms Nur Hidayah, was born.

“She was very bubbly... But a few years after her birth, she had to go for surgery to put steel implants into her legs because her bones were out of place. They were not inside her hip sockets, they were rest-

ing outside, at the muscles,” said Mr Rashid, who has another daughter and a son.

In primary school, Ms Nur Hidayah was diagnosed with lymphoma cancer. “It was difficult for her, but I always told my children to be positive in life,” said Mr Rashid.

By then, he had joined ST Kinetix – now known as ST Engineering Land Systems – where he worked as a mechanic for vehicles before becoming a trainer. Now 63, he is still with the company.

“Even though she would miss school for weeks or months because of her hospitalisation, she topped her secondary school class whenever she came back,” he said.

Ms Nur Hidayah obtained a diploma at Temasek Polytechnic before working as an accountant. But she died at 29 years old in 2011.

“Just before she passed away in the hospital, we were all beside her. I remember her looking at me with eyes that wanted to ask something,” he said. “I whispered to her ‘Do not worry. If you think there is something better for you on the other side, I will gladly let you go. Do not worry about me.’”

“Then she looked at her mother. I told her mother to say the same. Then she closed her eyes and left us.”

After her death, Mr Rashid began the task of pulling his family together. “I took my wife out almost every day for a year. I did not want to leave her alone with her thoughts,” he said.

One of the ways he coped with his loss was finding joy in volunteer work, which he continues to do today, in addition to his day job.

An avid volunteer with the People’s Association since the 1980s, Mr Rashid often helps to organise cultural and religious events for residents of Tampines, such as Hari Raya and Christmas get-togethers.

At the Darul Ghufuran Mosque, he is involved in organising Ramadan month prayers in void decks.

In 2014, Mr Rashid joined Changkat Changi Community Club’s Age Well Every Day programme as a volunteer instructor.

Conducted at six community centres by the National University of Singapore’s Mind-Science Centre, the programme consists of activities such as mindfulness practice and exercises that aim to help people aged 50 and above who are at risk of dementia.



Mr Abdul Rashid Ibrahim (above) and Madam Fazilah Mohamed got married in 1981 (left). The photo of their three children – (below, from left) Ms Nur Hidayah, Mr Muhammad Taufiq and Ms Nur Diana – was taken in 1989. Ms Nur Hidayah died in 2011 as a result of lymphoma cancer. PHOTOS: CHONG JUN LIANG, COURTESY OF ABDUL RASHID IBRAHIM



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THE STRAITS TIMES

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The Writing Coach

Felix Cheong has published 13 books across different genres, from poetry to short stories. A recipient of the Young Artist award, he has worked in the media industry for more than 20 years. He holds a master's degree in creative writing and currently teaches journalism at the University of Newcastle and Murdoch University.

THE STRAITS TIMES

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Mr Rashid said: “I hope to create more awareness of mental wellness among seniors through this programme, helping seniors to stay active and healthy so that diseases can stay away from them for as long as possible.

“Our life here is short, so let us live it to the fullest.”

If he has a chance to speak to his elder daughter again, Mr Rashid will not be shy like when he was young.

“I will tell her that I love her... And that I am a much better father and person because of her.”

rahimahr@sph.com.sg

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

I hope to create more awareness on mental wellness among seniors through this programme, helping seniors to stay active and healthy so that diseases can stay away from them for as long as possible. Our life here is short, so let us live it to the fullest.

MR ABDUL RASHID IBRAHIM



Mr Abdul Rashid Ibrahim conducting a class in the dementia education programme called Age Well Every Day at Changkat Changi Community Club, where he has been a volunteer instructor since 2014. PHOTO: PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION

IT'S A DATE

sweet spot
Partner Content

TOP PICKS

Yummy cookies

Maple Cookies is a Hong Kong bakery best known for its butter and coffee cookies. All products are homemade using natural ingredients. Try them at multiple Chinese New Year fairs islandwide from now to Feb 4, including Hougang Mall and Tiong Bahru Plaza.



Spain to Sweden

February's edition of Four Hands Kitchen will be held at Equina, at 16 Jiak Chuan Road, from Feb 25 to March 1. The Spanish tapas bar's chef Carlos Montobbio will play host to one Michelin-starred chef Gustav Knutsson of Bhoga Restaurang from Sweden. Go to www.4handskitchen.com.sg for reservations.



A British experience

Visa Infinite Gourmet returns on Feb 20 at Jaan, on Level 70 of Swissôtel The Stamford. Executive chef Kirk Westaway will present a menu of British flavours for guests at the Michelin-starred restaurant. It will be paired with the aromatic, fruity notes of Nicolas Feuillatte champagnes. Visit www.visagourmet.sg or call 6319-2153 to make reservations.



Head down to Velocity@Novena Square for scrumptious Chinese New Year treats and prizes. PHOTOS: VELOCITY@NOVENA SQUARE



Local flavour

From kueh lapis to almond paste dessert, Da Jia Le covers all bases when it comes to local desserts. With their products handmade with butter from SCS Dairy, you can expect good quality with each bite. Other dessert varieties include Teochew yam paste and black sesame paste.

Now available in ready-to-eat frozen family packs, the dessert can be conveniently heated up in the microwave or steamed.

Get them at various Chinese New Year fairs islandwide, including Velocity@Novena Square.



Handcrafted goodies

Get multiple treats for the price of one with Bread Garden's Symbolic Abundance Treasure Gift Box that is filled to the brim with handcrafted premium cookies.

The pineapple tarts come with a sweet filling and a golden buttery crust that crumbles easily. For something nuttier, try the macadamia butter cookies. Loaded with rich and crunchy Australian macadamia nuts, the cookies are a tasty mouthful.

Try these cookies at Lot One's Level 1 atrium from Jan 28 to Feb 3, from 11am to 9pm.



Taiwanese delights

To celebrate its grand opening at Yishun Central, Paradise Gastronomy will be rolling out a Chinese New Year menu at only \$18.90.

The promotional menu includes Taiwanese delights such as braised pork rice, oyster mee sua and salted egg chicken. Apart from these, the restaurant has other authentic Taiwanese delicacies like fried mala chicken — a new item on the menu.

Paradise Gastronomy will be at Food & Beverage Fair 2019, from March 21 to 24 at Singapore Expo Hall 5. Admission is free. Call 6747-4620 for enquiries.

Festive celebrations at the mall

Shop, redeem gifts and take part in a lucky draw with your family at Velocity@Novena Square

As part of Chinese New Year celebrations, Velocity@Novena Square will be rolling out exclusive events and lucky draws with prizes up for grabs.

The mall is dedicated to providing sports and active lifestyle needs under one roof, but during the Chinese New Year season will offer much more. Shop with your family and be entertained by many exciting activities, such as lion dance performances.

Food and fun

Till Feb 3, the mall's Chinese New Year atrium fair is offering a wide variety of festive goodies and products at its main atrium. Be sure to get your hands on premium pineapple tarts, prawn rolls and other delights to stock your home with.

At 1pm on Feb 9, be dazzled with an exciting lion dance performance to welcome the Chinese New Year. The troupe will be performing cai qing, otherwise known as the "plucking the green" routine.

Prizes to be redeemed

U-POPP, which stands for UOL's Power of Purchase

programme, is a rewards system offered exclusively at UOL malls, which Velocity@Novena Square is part of. Shoppers can register as a U-POPP member and earn points if they spend at least \$20 in a single receipt and submit it at the Customer Service Counter. They will be able to redeem e-vouchers and carpark rebates from March.

As part of the mall's Chinese New Year celebrations, shoppers who spend \$88 can redeem an exclusive set of six Velocity red packets. U-POPP members need only spend \$68 to qualify for the same redemption.

Visitors who spend \$188 can each redeem the red packets and a Velocity mandarin orange carrier. U-POPP members need only spend \$168 to qualify for the same redemption.

All items are available while stocks last. Terms and conditions apply.

Shoppers who spend a minimum of \$50 will also be automatically included in the UOL Festive Celebration Draw — they stand a chance to win a Jaguar E-PACE and other exciting prizes worth over \$160,000.



Shop and redeem exclusive Velocity red packets and mandarin orange carriers.



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FORUM

muel's TAKE

Solar energy a growing source of clean, renewable energy in Singapore

MOE's general guidelines on online behaviour not helpful

It is laudable that the Ministry of Education (MOE) is taking action against questionable Instagram accounts. However, I find its spokesman's response lacking (MOE to take action against 'lewd' Instagram account targeting junior college girls, ST Online; Jan 14).

The spokesman said students ought to be "mindful of privacy settings", "refrain from revealing personal information online" and "be safe and discerning users of digital space".

Such motherhood statements are not helpful because they are merely general guidelines on how students should behave on social media. It does not help anyone to tackle the issue specifically.

What worries me, also, are the words used, like "safe and discerning" and "be mindful". They seem to imply that students are not doing their part to protect themselves online and reek of victim-blaming.

According to pictures published on Chinese evening daily Lianhe Wanbao, the photos posted on the lewd account looked ordinary, with suggestive captions added to them.

The photos were already conservative, and it is not the girls' fault that their pictures – whether their accounts were made public or private – were exploited.

MOE must acknowledge that the exploitation was beyond the girls' control, and effort should go into sniffing out the perpetrator.

Sean Lim Wei Xin

Not practical for docs to flag every possible side effect

The Singapore Medical Council's disciplinary tribunal's decision to fine an orthopaedic surgeon \$100,000 for not telling his patient of possible side effects has caused much uproar and distress in the medical community (Doc fined \$100k for not warning patient of injection side effects; Jan 22).

Traditionally, doctors were told by legal experts that we ought to inform patients of complications that are serious, such as death or a serious disability, or common, such as bloating after a gastroscopy examination.

But if every possible complication of a medication or procedure has to be explained to patients, it will be extremely difficult to practise medicine.

As a simple example, the major and common side effects of paracetamol are mainly drug allergy and liver toxicity, if taken in large quantities. But paracetamol is also associated with more than 20 other potential adverse effects, including insomnia and headaches.

If not informing a patient of all potential adverse effects would lead to a \$100,000 fine, doctors may simply print out the long list of potential complications and side effects, and give it to patients.

This patient information overload is not necessarily a good thing, as much time would be spent simply digesting that information.

Important points may also get buried within the less key information.

Doctor-patient relationships are based on a foundation of goodwill, that the patient trusts his doctor, and the doctor does his best to help the patient. It will become very difficult for doctors to do their jobs, if they have to cover every possible source of complaints and lawsuits.

Desmond Wai (Dr)

Crack down on lack of decorum

The lack of decorum is not limited to young pupils at concert halls (Educate students on decorum at performances; Jan 22).

We see examples of it everywhere:

- People speaking loudly among themselves or on their phones in public spaces such as trains.
- Children treating public spaces as playgrounds and creating a din, without their guardians stepping in to control them.
- People wearing foul-smelling and dirty clothes in public.
- Bus and train commuters playing loud music or games without using headsets.

If Singapore wants to be home to world-class behaviour, much more needs to be done, beyond just demanding that teachers educate and discipline their students.

Parents and guardians must rein in misbehaving children immediately.

Public transport operators and the owners of buildings where people congregate must put up posters reminding the public of the expected decorum. They can also make use of periodic public announcements, like how it is done on Japanese public transport.

Only then can Singaporeans live and work peacefully.

Cheang Peng Wah

Parents should be taught decorum too

To echo Mrs Tan Sek Jen's feedback (Educate students on decorum at performances; Jan 22), I have noticed that parents, too, are sometimes found lacking when it comes to decorum and social behaviour.

I have seen instances of people yawning, coughing or sneezing without covering their mouths.

Students are influenced by their family's behaviour, so parents should be reminded of the need to behave as role models for their children.

The Ministry of Education should consider conducting compulsory sessions to teach both students and their parents decorum and gracious behaviour, with tests thrown in for good measure to make sure they pay attention.

Schools should also reward gracious behaviour among students, which will hopefully cut down instances of bad behaviour.

Ng Sung Nang

ST wine

our best picks

Wines to go with CNY dishes

Here are ST Wine's top 10 picks and the food to pair them with

Deep Wood Estate Cabernet Sauvignon Hillside 2016

Country: Australia

Usual price: \$75

ST Wine price: **\$66**

Food pairing: Braised noodle, bak kwa and nian gao

Salvalai Monile Ripasot Corvina 2014

Country: Italy

Usual price: \$70

ST Wine price: **\$55**

Food pairing: Pan-fried beef, barbecued red meats and dumplings

Isabel Estate Pinot Noir 2016

Country: New Zealand

Usual price: \$75

ST Wine price: **\$66**

Food pairing: Roasted duck and fish dishes

Koyle Royal Syrah 2009

Country: Chile

Usual price: \$60

ST Wine price: **\$52**

Food pairing: Roasted and grilled meat, curry

Tenuta Di Corte Giacobbe Suove 2017

Country: Italy

Usual price: \$45

ST Wine price: **\$38**

Food pairing: Lobster, grilled fish, abalone, smoked salmon lo hei and other seafood

Chateau La Mauleone, Lalande De Pomerol 2013

Country: France

Usual price: \$50

ST Wine price: **\$43**

Rating: RP 92 points

Food pairing: Buddha jumps over the wall, pen cai, braised and other stewed dishes

Montes Limited Cabernet Sauvignon Carmenere 2016

Country: Chile

Usual price: \$43

ST Wine price: **\$39**

Rating: JS 91points

Food pairing: Roasted meats, preserved meats

Kalleske Clarry's Grenache-shiraz-mataro 2017

Country: Australia

Usual price: \$55

ST Wine price: **\$49**

Food pairing: Peking duck and roasted suckling pig

Kaiken Terroir Series Torrontes 2016

Country: Argentina

Usual price: \$39

ST Wine price: **\$33**

Food pairing: Teochew-Cantonese style steamed fish, steamboat and chicken dishes

Koyle Auma 2013

Country: Chile

Usual price: \$180

ST Wine price: **\$168**

Rating: RP 93 Points

Food pairing: Roasted meats, roasted pork, bak kwa, lasagna, cold cuts

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More room to improve training safety in SAF

It saddened me to read of recent national service-related training ground accidents (Actor Aloysius Pang seriously hurt during SAF exercise in NZ, Jan 21; and NSF dies in vehicle collision during local field exercise, Nov 4, 2018). While the Ministry of Defence (Mindef) has been proactive in pushing through new safety regulations, more can be done in the areas of training and maintenance.

For instance, training in an armour regiment can involve complex manoeuvres in armoured vehicles.

And even the basic driving of such vehicles can be challenging as they do not steer like regular cars. Yet our operationally ready

national servicemen (NSmen) are expected to step into these vehicles every one or two years after long periods away.

More time should be allocated to let armoured vehicle drivers reacquire themselves with the complexity of driving, while not increasing the total time spent in camp every year.

Currently, in-camp training in armour regiments provides for only a short day and night familiarisation drive.

By giving drivers more time to sharpen their skills, I believe that they will be more confident during the actual mission training, lowering the risk of accidents.

As for maintenance, expecting full-time national servicemen

(NSFs) and NSmen to be able to handle and maintain complex machinery, such as tanks and artillery, seems unwise.

Mindef can instead employ a much larger team of full-time maintenance personnel, outside of the NSF population, to reduce the need for young NSFs to handle unfamiliar heavy machinery.

There may be better solutions than the ones I have proposed, given the many challenges Mindef faces.

However, I believe that every Singaporean should play a part in making sure Mindef continues to refine its safety protocols.

One injury or fatality is too many.

Mark Lim Xian Jin

Singtel TV line-up: Changes made by content providers

We thank Mrs Elaine Wee for her feedback (Singtel TV cuts number of channels but not charges; Jan 18).

The majority of channels that air on Singtel TV are curated and aggregated by our content providers.

Some changes in the line-up may occur from time to time when content providers decide to remove channels due to low viewership.

This was the case for most of the changes to the Action Value Pack that Mrs Wee subscribed to.

For example, Fox Networks Group removed Nat Geo Music from its regional channel line-up,

while Eleven Sports Network stopped its Pay TV operations in Singapore.

We assure our customers that we do our best to work with our content providers to maintain their channel portfolio, and we endeavour to add new channels whenever we can.

Last year, we added a number of channels, such as Asian Food Channel, e-Le and beIN Sports Max, which are also available as part of our Action Value Pack.

Candy Chua (Ms)
Vice-President, Consumer Operations
Consumer Singapore
Singtel

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Bar ex-PRs who dodge NS from working here

It was reported that permanent residents can renounce their status as PRs without serving national service, but that this will be taken into account if they apply to return to Singapore to study or work (Man charged with failing to report for NS; Jan 22).

Those who renounce their PR status for this purpose have shown that they are not prepared to shoulder the duty of defending Singapore.

Our policy should clearly state that PRs who renounce their PR status to avoid serving NS are

barred from returning to Singapore to live, study or work.

I would be interested to know the official number of applications by such former PRs to study or work in Singapore and how many of these have been approved?

Tan Soon Hock

Help 'pure' drug abusers rehabilitate and reintegrate

I commend the Ministry of Home Affairs' move to amend the law to segregate "pure" drug abusers who only consume drugs from drug abusers who face charges over other offences (Law amended to focus more on rehabilitation of drug abusers; Jan 16).

For pure abusers, the emphasis should be on effective rehabilitation, not long incarceration.

First-time abusers should undergo a rehabilitation programme that is more humane and focused on their treatment.

There should also be a clear distinction between first-time

abusers and repeat abusers, whose rehabilitation programme should still be treatment-focused, but also include some punitive measures.

The rehabilitation programme can incorporate elements such as going cold turkey, counselling, yoga and meditation, physical exercise and work therapy.

Pure abusers who wish to pursue a course of study should be encouraged and facilitated by the authorities.

Education would help them find employment upon release, which is an important component of their rehabilitation.

And even if the rehabilitation

programme is effective, society still needs to be there to help abusers after their release.

They need love and care from their families and friends, along with understanding employers willing to give them jobs with good enough salaries to support their families.

There is only so much that drug rehabilitation centres and prisons can do.

Society must give them a chance to prove they have reformed. If ex-abusers find society hostile and unforgiving, there is every chance of them returning to their old ways.

Pavithran Vidyadhran

Surgery charges depend on treatments offered

We refer to the letter by Dr Wong Kai Peng (Shocking fee quoted for quick surgery; Jan 15).

Dr Wong was referred to National University Hospital's (NUH) senior eye surgeon who specialises in glaucoma care.

After assessing Dr Wong's cataract and glaucoma conditions, our surgeon recommended treatments that, in his opinion, were suitable for Dr Wong.

He was provided an estimate of the charges that were based on multiple factors, including the procedures, implants and consumables used, contingency for possible complications and government subsidies.

In Dr Wong's case, the estimates were based on a complex procedure performed under

general anaesthesia by a senior consultant that included both a laser procedure for cataract extraction with implant and glaucoma surgery with another implant. The estimates were for a non-subsidised patient.

In his letter, Dr Wong mentioned that Singapore National Eye Centre's (SNEC) charges were significantly lower.

We met Dr Wong on Jan 17 to gather more information and address his queries.

We understand that SNEC had recommended a different treatment option, without a laser procedure and with a different glaucoma implant. This resulted in lower charges than NUH's estimate.

While professional opinions in

what constitutes the most appropriate treatment for an individual patient may sometimes vary, the surgeon should have informed the patient about other treatment options, as well as the associated costs.

We apologise for this and have counselled our surgeon on this matter.

We would like to assure the public that treatment options are available to patients based on their conditions and needs.

Subsidised patients enjoy government subsidies. Assistance is also available for patients with financial needs. We wish Dr Wong the best of health.

Eugene Liu (Dr)
Chief Executive Officer
National University Hospital

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Cast the net wide

Singapore's first deep-sea fish farm off St John's Island was started in 1997 as a pilot project by the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority. It uses deep net cages (foreground) to rear fish.

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